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GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL.

LONDON:

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GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL.

A Novel.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF 'EAST LYNN,' 'TREVLYN HOLD,' 'ST. MARTIN'S EVE,' 'BESSIE RANE,' ETC.

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GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL.



CHAPTER I.

IN THE EVENING LIGHT.

NOTHING could be more beautiful. The sun was sinking in the west, casting direct rays on the long line of blue water in a flood of golden brightness. It shone on the white sails of the pleasure-boats, on the fishing-craft putting out for their night's work; it brought into clearer distinctness the fine vessels passing far away on their course; it played on the chain of mountains that terminated the land prospect to the right, stretching their undulating outline miles on in the distance. Calm, soothing, still. The turbulent sea-waves were unseen this evening; the froth and foam rose not. All the world seemed to be at rest from its troubles and its turmoil, its sinful passions and petty

strifes, as if it would impart to men's hearts a foretaste of that peace which shall be realised only in heaven.

The place, Little Bay, was a small quiet Welsh watering-place, where the bathing was good, the air salubrious, and the sea-view of vast extent. Little frequented in those earlier days, it was of meek pretension and very reasonable, entertaining no prevision of the fashionable resort it was destined afterwards to become.

Within a large open bow-window, partly looking out on the scene that one of them so loved, partly listening to the desultory talk of a gentleman who stood outside and leaned his arms on its frame, were two girls. She who was next to him, answering his repartees before they were well spoken, was richly dressed in charming blue silk and lace—a young, fair, bright girl of seventeen, in appearance almost a child; her laughing eyes of a purple blue, her hair dark brown and luxuriant, her cheeks rivalling the hue of the damask rose—altogether as lovely a vision of beauty as ever enthralled the senses of man. The other was very nice-looking also, but of quieter aspect. A gentle girl, she, just nineteen, with large shy hazel eyes, hair of a lighter shade of brown, a complexion fair and rather pale—a soft sweet face that was pleasant to look upon. She was taller

than her companion, and yet not more than of middle height; her dress was a simple muslin, costing at most but a few shillings. You cannot judge by dress of the ways and means of its wearer, as all the world knows. The richly-dressed girl in her blue silk and its costly Honiton lace—Caroline Kage—had been straitened in means all her life, and never expected to be lifted out of the straits except by some fortunate marriage; the other would probably inherit at least a hundred thousand pounds, for she was one of the daughters of the rich Mr. Canterbury, of Chilling.

And he who talked to them—Thomas Kage? He was a barrister by profession, and had to work hard for his living, not expecting to be helped by so much as a shilling from anybody in the world. A slight-made man, appearing from his slenderness almost of middle height, but not so in reality. His hair and eyes were dark; his face, nothing to boast of, was honest, genial, true. People called Thomas Kage ‘plain,’ and plain he was, judging him by the lines of severe beauty; but the countenance was a *good* countenance, carrying its own index straight to the hearts of discerning men.

It was the third week in September; they had gone to the seaside the third week in August; so that for a month now he and these two girls had

been daily and almost hourly companions. The result was one that is not rare. Which of the two had learnt to love him most, it would be difficult to say. Millicent Canterbury had never met him in her life before; Caroline Kage had, though not frequently: he and she were cousins several degrees removed.

‘Why are you so serious, Miss Canterbury?’ he suddenly asked, bending his head more forward to look at her where she sat, a little back from the window.

‘Am I serious?’ she returned, a pink blush mantling in her smooth cheek at his words, and she bent her too-conscious face to hide it.

‘At least, you are silent.’

‘I was listening to you and Caroline.’

‘I think you generally prefer listening to talking,’ he said, a smile of rare sweetness breaking over his lips. That smile was the one sole beauty of Thomas Kage’s face, redeeming it from its reproach of plainness while it lasted.

‘Do I?’

Do I! Carelessly though the answering words were given, Millicent Canterbury knew that the charge was widely true, and the pink blush increased to crimson. When in his presence, she could no more have been free of tongue than a mute: her love for him was earnest, real, passion-

ate; and this same love, as most of us know, chains the lips when in the presence of its idol.

‘And do you agree with Caroline or with me?’

‘With you,’ Millicent was obliged to confess, for she was of a straightforward nature, knowing nothing of evasion; but the avowal caused the crimson to become as a very spot of fire; ‘for I feel sure Mrs. Kage will not allow us to go.’

They had been discussing a projected sail for the morrow, these two girls, with Miss Annesley as companion, who was staying with them, and Mr. Kage as protector. Caroline spoke of it as an event sure and decided; he had quietly declared it would turn out ‘all moonshine.’

‘You will see,’ continued Miss Kage—‘Leta, what in the world are your cheeks so scarlet for?—And I think it is exceedingly wicked of you, Thomas, to throw cold water on what I propose.’

Thomas Kage laughed.

‘Cold water! Ah, Caroline, if you only knew how hot the water I would throw, if that might bring the sail to fruition!’ he pursued in a tone of graver meaning. ‘The prospect of taking you is delightful, but it will not be realised. As Miss Canterbury says, your mother would not permit it.’

‘It is so stupid of her to be afraid of the water,’ said Caroline hastily. ‘As if people got drowned in a calm sea.’

He made no reply, only glanced at her, and something like emotion passed over her lovely face. She was conscious, and he was conscious, that Mrs. Kage's veto would not be laid upon the expedition on account of any danger they might incur, although it was true that she was a coward in regard to the water, but because she was beginning to dread this frequent and close companionship.

'Mrs. Kage regards the sea as a treacherous ogre, waiting always to swallow up the unwary who may venture on it, you know, Caroline,' he remarked indifferently, as he opened a book he held and turned over its pages.

'What will you say to me to-morrow morning if I meet you with the news that I have persuaded mamma into consenting?'

'I shall say you are the dearest cousin in the world—'

'That's easily said, when you have no other,' she petulantly interrupted.

'And the most clever of diplomatists,' he continued. 'You should let a man finish, Caroline. I wish you success, but I have no expectation that the wish will be realised.'

'What kind of wish do you call that, pray?'

'A faithless one, I suppose.'

'Just so. And I will convict you of shame when I bring you mamma's consent.'

‘ So be it, Caroline,’ he answered.—‘ And you, Miss Canterbury? You have not said you will go. Will you?’

‘ Yes, I—I think so,’ was the reply, given with some hesitation. ‘ I don’t care much to go on the sea.’

‘ Why, I have heard you say that you love the sea.’

‘ I love to look at it. Seeing it as we do from these windows, I cannot imagine anything in the world more beautiful. I could look at it for ever, and not be tired; watching its changing colours; speculating on the large vessels that pass; seeing what they do in the little boats cruising off the land. My love for the sea is something strange. But *on* it I am nearly as great a coward as Mrs. Kage: and in rough weather I am so sea-sick.’

He laughed at the wind-up. Caroline Kage spoke rather testily.

‘ There’s no particular necessity for your going into raptures over the sea, Leta, if you do love it.’

‘ No,’ said Leta in a meek tone, ‘ of course not.’

They called her ‘ Leta’ almost always. When a little child, before she was able to speak plain, she had so pronounced her own name Millicent; the appellation had never left her, and never would.

The sun went down in a blaze of gold. The clear and beautiful opal tints, seen only in the north-western sky, succeeded to it; and still Thomas Kage stood on.

Suddenly, as if prompted by some momentary recollection, he removed his arms from the window to look at his watch; and Caroline saw the movement with a jealous eye and failing heart. It seemed to foreshadow his departure; and she would willingly have kept him by her side for ever.

‘Why do you not come in, Thomas? The idea of having stayed outside all this while!’

‘I cannot come in now. I promised my mother to be with her for tea.’

‘How many more evenings will you tell us that? Your mother is very exacting.’

‘Never was there a mother less so,’ he rejoined emphatically, a glow on his honest face. ‘But she likes to have me with her at tea; and I have been keeping her waiting for it. Tiresome syrens, both of you, to enchain a fellow so, and cause him to forget the hour-glass! Farewell, and better manners to you.’

He turned down the gravel path with a quick step—the house stood back in a garden—passed through the gate, and nodded gaily as he raised his hat. It was as if a shadow had fallen on the

hearts of both; and they listened in silence and sadness to the echo of his fleet footsteps.

He had set off to run as though he were a school-boy. Turning a bend of the road, a lady came in view, and he had to slacken speed. It was Miss Annesley; she had come to Little Bay with Mrs. Kage.

‘Are you bound for Mrs. Garston’s?’ she stopped to ask.

‘Not now. I am hastening home to my mother.’

‘That is well,’ returned Miss Annesley quaintly. ‘Had you been going to Mrs. Garston, I should have said, don’t go. She is cross this evening; cross with you.’

‘I know I ought to have gone there,’ he confessed, a smile breaking over his face. ‘That’s it, I suppose?’

‘That is it. And I was charged to tell you, if we by chance met, that she would not receive you now until to-morrow. She means it, Mr. Kage.’

‘Very well. I’ll go and make my peace with her then. Thank you. Farewell for the present.’

Resuming his quick pace, he gained the door of a pretty cottage, also facing the sea. A staid, hard woman of fifty, as tall as a lighthouse, admitted him.

‘You have kept your mother waiting a long

while, Mr. Thomas,' was the greeting he received, delivered with a severe countenance. 'She'd not let the tea be made till you came in.'

'I am very sorry, Dorothy,' he answered, never thinking, as most men at his age would, that it was nearly time Dorothy left off her lectures to him. She had nursed him when a baby, and been his mother's ever-faithful attendant since, through good and ill, for eight-and-twenty years. 'I did not happen to look at my watch, and the time slipped on.'

'I think I'd leave the coming home to meals an open question, if I were you, sir, while we are here. My lady ought to have had her tea early this evening, for she's got a fearful bad headache come on.'

The keeping the 'meals' waiting by so much as five minutes was amidst the catalogue of Dorothy's cardinal sins; and Thomas Kage was aware he had not been strictly punctual of late.

'A headache!' he repeated in some surprise; for Lady Kage was not subject to the malady.

'Yes, she have,' said Dorothy, as Thomas went in.

At the open window of the sitting-room sat Lady Kage—a gentle, thoughtful woman, with a countenance as good as his own, and a voice as sweet. She had but reached the age which women

are apt to call middle life; but she was in ill health, and her delicate face looked careworn.

‘My darling mother!’ he said, kissing her fondly; ‘I am so sorry.’

‘Sorry for what, Thomas?’

‘For keeping you waiting tea. Why did you not take it? Dorothy says your head is bad.’

She kept his hand in hers; and her eyes, looking up to his, were full of smiles.

‘Dorothy has been talking, I see.’

‘That she has; giving it me well. But you ought to have had your tea, mother dear. You don’t know how these things pain me.’

‘They need not, Thomas.’

‘They do, though, and bring home to me all my selfish ingratitude. If I were wanting my tea, and you out, I should be sure to order it without thought of you.’

‘That you would not, if you expected me to come home; no, though your head were splitting for want of it. Which mine is not.’

‘I don’t know how I came to let the time slip on, unheeded. I was talking with Miss Canterbury and Caroline. What can have given you the headache, mother?’

‘I think I walked too far this morning. I mean to have a whole day’s rest to-morrow indoors.’

It may almost be said that Lady Kage answered mechanically; for her thoughts, as she spoke, were far away. The time had slipped on, unheeded, 'talking with Miss Canterbury and Caroline.'

Mr. Kage's apologies of late had been so entirely similar to this present one, that the suspicion, hovering in his mother's mind, grew greater and greater. That he must be learning to love one of those two young ladies she felt as sure of as though she could look into his heart and read it. Which of them was it?

Dorothy brought in the tea-tray, and placed it on the side of the table farthest from her mistress.

'Mr. Thomas can pour it out this evening, as you feel ill, my lady,' decided she, with the privileged authority of one used to have her way.—
'It's quite ready, sir.'

He laughed as he sat down, saying he hoped he should not put the cream and sugar into the teapot instead of the cups.

Thomas Kage had not roughed it in chambers or lodgings as three-fourths of the young men have: his mother's home in London was his home, and his mother indulgently did all things for him. The world guessed little how very simple the home was, or how entirely happy they

were in it. Mother and son have rarely been so bound in heart together.

Awkwardly as most unaccustomed men, Thomas Kage served his mother with her tea first, and then poured out his own. He was quite unconscious that his cup was consequently the stronger of the two. He would have given her every good at his own expense that this world can bestow, and thought it no sacrifice.

‘You say you have been with the two young ladies this evening?’ observed Lady Kage.

‘Are you sure I have put enough cream and sugar?—Yes, I have been with them.’

‘As usual—as usual, Thomas. Are you drifting into love for either of them?’

‘Mother!’

It was all very well to say ‘Mother!’ and to say it with a start; but Lady Kage could not avoid seeing one thing,—that her son’s face grew red and conscious as a girl’s. She knew now that she was not mistaken. He upset some water on the tea-tray, in a sudden effort to drown the teapot.

‘Which of the two is it, Thomas?’ she quietly asked.

By this time he was recovering self-possession and equanimity. He looked at his mother in the twilight, and then, pausing, sent his good, dark,

candid eyes rather far out to sea through the open window.

‘Mother, I think you are mistaken; I hope you are. The maddest thing I could do would be to fall in love with any girl, no matter whom she might be. It may be years—years and years—before my circumstances enable me to think of a wife, if they ever do.’

‘That is just it, Thomas. Otherwise—’

‘Otherwise I might be at liberty to fall in love to-morrow,’ he said with a laugh. ‘Ah, yes; we all have to bend to circumstances.’

Lady Kage did not dismiss her opinion, but would not seem to pursue it.

‘Which of the two (if either) would your choice have fallen upon, Thomas? Miss Canterbury?’

‘Miss Canterbury!’ he echoed in surprise so genuine that something like a chill struck across his mother’s heart, and destroyed a vision that had been rearing itself in fondness before her mind. ‘You must be dreaming, mother dear. Miss Canterbury will count her money by scores of thousands, perhaps by hundreds of thousands. Old Canterbury may be worth a million.’

‘If Millicent Canterbury is rich in wealth, you are rich in worth, Thomas. A union between you would not be unequal.’

He smiled and shook his head at the thought

of his mother's partiality; but his answer was given in a tone of firm decision :

‘It would be so unequal, mother dear, that I should never attempt to entertain it for a moment—no, not though I were dying of love for her. But the thought of loving Millicent Canterbury has never entered my head; so be at ease.’

‘I could not have wished a better wife for you than Millicent Canterbury; I never met a sweeter girl,’ spoke Lady Kage. ‘As to Caroline, Millicent is worth a thousand of her.’

‘Caroline is as poor as I am; and therefore, to speak of marriage in connection with her, would be talking fruitless nonsense,’ returned Mr. Kage, an embarrassment in his tone that his mother did not like to hear, for it betrayed too surely where his affections lay. And then ensued a silence.

Thomas broke it. Lifting his head, after a pause of thought, he looked full at his mother in the deepening twilight, as if he deemed it well to set the matter at rest, for himself as well as her.

‘I was twenty-seven last July, mother, as you know; and I am earning so little at my profession, as you also know, getting on so slowly in it—not at all, in fact—that the chances are I may attain to forty years of age without being able to keep a wife as I should like to keep her. Believe me, therefore, there is no danger, no hope, that I can,

or shall, fall in love to any purpose. I may cast a fancy here, I may cast it there, but nothing is likely to result from it.'

'I should not wish you to get into hopeless love,' spoke Lady Kage in a low tone.

'Nor I. But if I did, I could bear it.'

The beautiful opal tints in the clear north-western sky grew less distinct in the fading light. Lady Kage, her head growing more painful, went up to bed; and Thomas sat alone, with his own reflections.

No, there might be no thought of marriage for him. As to this pleasant dream he had been lately falling into, why, let him dream on while he might, it would not be for so very long. In October the seaside party would disperse, he and his mother for London, the others for their far-away home. And then? Then would come for him the old working life again, during which he should *forget*—forget, or pretend at it. And she—

'Ain't there no lights wanted here?'

The interruption came from Dorothy. She had opened the door, crusty still, to ask; and Thomas Kage awoke out of himself to find it was as dark as it would be that night.

No, no lights yet. The clock was striking eight, and he put on his hat and went out.

Calm, warm, light, and lovely was the night.

The clear sky was luminous, the lights from the different vessels on the sea twinkled like stars. Passing down a turning, he came to a house that, in comparison with the cottage rented by his mother, looked like a mansion. A footman answered his knock.

‘Has Mrs. Garston retired to her room?’

‘No, sir, not yet.’

‘Say to her, then, that I send in my kind regards, and will come to see her after breakfast in the morning.’

Regard for the very old lady prompted him to come and say this. Mrs. Garston was eighty years of age. Never had living man a kinder heart than Thomas Kage, and he was grieved to have failed in his customary visit to her. And he departed on his way again.

On the lawn before Mrs. Kage’s house, flitting about in freedom, were the two girls. Mr. Kage joined them. Now they stood together at the railings, watching the aforesaid lights, and tracking the vessels on their gentle course; now they paced the walks, now rested on the green bench under the mulberry-tree. But the same low, unconsciously-tender interchange of converse was ever there. The companionship, becoming all too sweet, was not interrupted. Every minute, every hour, as they went by, did but add strength to

the links of the chain by which Fate was binding the three hearts together, indissolubly, but in a cross and contrary fashion, as it is in the nature of Fate to do.

‘Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.’

They would have lingered on until midnight, but at nearly ten o’clock out came Miss Annesley. She was a good and true young woman, wanting some years of thirty, amiable, prudent, sensible, and calm of temperament; as it is only right the daughter of an earnest clergyman should be.

‘Mrs. Kage is so vexed that you should be out of doors. She wishes you to come in at once.’

‘O, mamma has woke up at last, has she?’ responded Caroline carelessly. ‘A little the worse in temper for her long sleep, I suppose.’

‘You must know, Caroline, that it is high time you did come in,’ said Miss Annesley.

‘There, don’t preach, Sarah; we are coming.’ And Millicent was the first to hasten in.

Years and years before—say thirty—an officer who had risen rapidly in India, Colonel Sir Charles Kage, K.C.B., came home on a three years’ leave, with his wife and little daughter. He was without connections, in the sense that the word is

generally understood, only possessing a few plain relatives. But a K.C.B. is sure to find friends in plenty; and Sir Charles's London residence was soon overflowing with them. Amidst others, frequenting it, was a peer who had nearly come to the end of his available income—his children having considerably assisted in its disposal—and consequently he put off a small portion of his superfluous pride: Lord Gunse.

The object which had chiefly brought Sir Charles Kage home, was the ill-health of his wife. Just for a few weeks she rallied, but only to sink again; and in less than six months from the day of their landing in England, she died. The little girl, Charlotte, was six years old then, and Sir Charles immediately took a young lady into his house as her governess. She was a Miss Carr, a gentle, retiring, unpretending girl, who kept herself in all humility out of the way of Sir Charles's guests, and learnt to love the little Charlotte. If the guests by chance saw her, they took no notice of her. Lord Gunse and Lady Gunse and the Honourable Misses Gunse quite ignored her. In point of fact, those aristocratic people, had they condescended to think of the nursery governess at all, would have classed her as a domestic. She was of no family; perhaps had never had as much as a father and mother.

Lady Gunse and the Misses Gunse were at that time very much at Sir Charles Kage's house, consoling the bereaved widower. It was thought by the maid-servants (who are generally shrewd observers) that their master might have had any one of the three honourable young ladies for the asking. A fine man of only five-and-forty, a K.C.B. already, and with plenty of service before him, would be a prize undoubtedly in the matrimonial market.

What, then, must have been the shocked indignation of this noble family to awake one morning to the news of Sir Charles Kage's marriage? Just twelve months after the death of his wife he quietly led to church the nursery governess, saying nothing to anybody. When taxed with his crime by Lord Gunse (out of pure regard for Sir Charles, of course, and his blighted interests), the brave soldier wrung the peer's hand, and avowed that the good qualities of Maria Carr had won his esteem and love, and that he could not have given the little Charlotte a more loving and admirable mother had he taken the whole world to pick and choose from. Of course she was young; he did not deny that; but every year as it went by would remedy the defect.

'She is of no family,' groaned the wrathful peer.

‘No family!’ repeated Sir Charles. ‘My dear lord, she is of as good a family as my own.’

And thus the patient, humble governess, Maria Carr, had become the second Lady Kage.

Poor young wife! A child was born to her in due course, a little boy, who was named Thomas Charles Carr, and she was the happiest of the happy. Sir Charles waited for the christening, and then went back to India, for his leave was up. Lady Kage did not accompany him. He was tender of her, as though she were some rare and precious plant, and he knew she was scarcely yet strong enough to bear the fatigue of travel. In the course of the year she and Charlotte and the boy-baby should come out to him, he said; and so they parted. Parted to meet no more in this world, for Sir Charles Kage died very soon after regaining India.

Upon her slender pension, which would die with her, Lady Kage had lived since, devoting herself to the two children, her step-daughter and son, with equal care and love. None save herself and Dorothy, and perhaps her dutiful, thoughtful boy, knew how she had managed, and cut and contrived her income, so as to educate them well and to give him his terms at college. Dorothy—faithful to her young mistress, stern to everybody else, eating ever the bread of carefulness, and

seeing that the rest ate it, doing the work of ten—made a boast of waiting on her lady as efficiently in her one sole person as if she had had at command a leash of helpmates.

So the years passed on, and the children grew up. Charlotte married; Thomas qualified himself for the Bar. And when it might have seemed that Lady Kage could have taken some ease from her solicitude and care, her health began to fail. Very gradually at first. Even Dorothy saw nothing of it; but the development of the disease, which the doctors thought was connected with the heart, was more rapid, and anxiety supervened. Not yet alarm. This visit to the salubrious Welsh watering-place was made at her son's earnest solicitation, in the hope that change of air might restore her. How anxiously Thomas looked at her morning after morning he strove to hide from all eyes: and he was forced to confess to his heart secretly that he did not discern much improvement.

Back again for an instant to the time of Colonel Sir Charles Kage's residence in London. At his house there was frequently to be met a distant cousin of his, Alfred Kage, for whom he had purchased a commission, and otherwise befriended. He was a very handsome and gentlemanly young fellow, good-natured, empty-headed. The Hon-

ourable Misses Gunse liked to talk nonsense with him, especially the youngest of them, Caroline, who was as empty-headed as himself. After the startling marriage of Sir Charles, Lord Gunse gave orders that the intimacy between the two houses should peremptorily cease. This was accomplished; but Lieutenant Kage and Caroline Gunse had grown really attached to each other: and, some two or three years afterwards, she married him in defiance of parental displeasure. They had nothing but his pay; and therefore the union, to a person of the Honourable Caroline Gunse's expensive tastes, could not be said to have turned out felicitously. He lived but about ten years, attained to a captaincy only, and left her with one child, Caroline, almost an infant. Mrs. Kage, who was the Honourable Mrs. Kage in spite of her poverty, and prided herself upon the fact, retired to Chilling, a village on the borders of Wales, noted for its lovely scenery and for the reasonableness of both rent and provisions, and there established herself. She had her pension, and also a small income left her by one of her sisters—together about five hundred a-year. The child, Caroline, was turned seventeen now, more lovely than her mother used to be, and quite as wilful.

It was somewhat curious that Mrs. Kage and Lady Kage should have come to sojourn by acci-

dent this year at the same watering-place. They had met occasionally in the past thirty years; but the old dislike and scorn felt for the governess, who had forgotten herself so completely as to suffer a K.C.B. to marry her, had little, if at all, abated. The Honourable Mrs. Kage was decorously civil when face to face with her; but she generally had recourse to an essence-bottle if Lady Kage's name was by chance mentioned, as if it brought some infection with it. Mrs. Kage had grown into a sigh-away, die-away lady now, liking to pass her time on a sofa, surrounded by shawls and scents and easy indolence. Her soft languor and show of sweetness, her subdued voice of affectation, might have taken in a saint; but there lived not a woman in this world of deceit more utterly heartless, more intensely, selfishly alive to her own interests, than the widow of Alfred Kage.

It is not a nice thing to say of a woman that she is made up of craft within and artlessness without; but it must be said of Mrs. Kage, for it was the simple truth. Even in this visit of hers to the seaside, she had craftily contrived to come free, at the cost of others. But for having her expenses paid, she could not have ventured on it at all. The two young ladies she had brought with her—Sarah Annesley, the only child of the

Rector of Chilling, and Millicent, the youngest daughter of the wealthy George Canterbury—had their share of the cost so liberally provided, especially the latter, that Mrs. Kage's pocket escaped scot-free, as she had meant it to do. In her sweetly-artless manner, she had affectionately enlarged to Mr. Canterbury on the necessity of some bracing sea-air for his youngest and prettiest daughter; she had assured old Parson Annesley it would be more than good for Sarah; she had enlisted warmly the wishes of the two young ladies themselves; and the thing was done.

They came to Little Bay; and Mrs. Kage was not agreeably surprised to find that Lady Kage, with her son, had also taken possession of a cottage in the same place, not three days before. Mrs. Kage, making the best of things, was civil, but capricious and affected in manner, and held herself as much aloof as she could. She need not have feared; Lady Kage was too ill to seek for even her society; but Thomas, quite unconscious that Mrs. Kage looked down on his mother, or wished to slight her, grew intimate with them, and was at their house continually. Had he been compelled to say which of the two ladies bore the higher position, he might in his simplicity have awarded it to Lady Kage. So, how was it likely to cross his mind that his mother was despised?

Miss Annesley, as you have seen, came forth to the garden to interrupt the subtly-dangerous companionship, and bid them enter. On the chintz sofa, having woke up from a longer evening nap than usual, sat Mrs. Kage, with her fan and her essence-bottles—a small, slender gentlewoman, with a faded face and a faded cap, and faded straw-coloured hair. The cheeks would have been faded too, but for the delicate carmine daily imparted to them in her toilet-chamber. She took out the stopper of her smelling-salts as they entered, and held it to her nose, speaking softly.

‘My dear children, how could you think of being out in the air so late?—Did *you* keep them, Thomas Kage?’ with a slight accession of acrimony.

‘I am not sure but I did; and I have come in to take the blame,’ he lightly answered, with the ever-cordial tone in his true voice. ‘But it is a warm, genial night, Mrs. Kage—one to tempt even you.’

Mrs. Kage languidly opened her fan, and did not seem to hear. She had the gift of being deaf when occasion needed it.

Caroline went to the piano. Sometimes he sang with them, or stood by listening to their songs. She glanced round for him now.

‘No, Caroline, I cannot stay to-night.’

But that Caroline turned her face back, and kept it turned, Mrs. Kage might have read the look of blank disappointment which rose at the words. It was getting late, he added, and his mother was ill.

‘Quite right, certainly,’ spoke Mrs. Kage. ‘Don’t you think that your mother—ah—gives way a little?’ she continued, having made the pause to flirt some drops out of her cologne-water phial.

‘Gives way! my mother?’ he rejoined in surprise. ‘If you only knew how earnest and energetic she is in all her duties, you would not fancy so. My great fear now is, that she is exerting herself beyond her strength, simply because she will not give way to illness.’

‘Possibly,’ rejoined Mrs. Kage, with gentle indifference, as she resumed her fan. ‘Good-night to you, if you must go.’

In an opportunity that occurred presently, when she and her daughter were alone, Mrs. Kage took occasion to remark, in her languid manner, that she thought they had rather much of Thomas Kage’s company, and to wonder why he came. Caroline laughed; a forced laugh. The words seemed to be spoken without ulterior motive; but she was quite conscious that her mother shot

a keen glance at her from the depths of her cold light eyes.

‘What if I were to tell you, mamma, that he comes for Leta?’

For once in her life, Mrs. Kage was startled into sincerity. The notion of connecting Thomas Kage’s visits with Millicent Canterbury had never presented itself to her mind.

‘For Leta?’

‘One cannot help one’s thoughts, mamma. Of course, it is all pure nonsense; it could not turn out anything else, with Thomas Kage’s poor prospects; but I’m sure there is a little bit of fancy between them, especially on Leta’s side.’

Caroline’s pretty face wore a heightened colour, as she toyed with one of her mother’s essence-bottles. Perfectly conscious was she of the deliberate deceit. She did not scruple to speak it, for it threw off suspicion from herself.

‘Dear me!’

‘And he wants to take us all for a sail to-morrow—Sarah and Leta and me. I promised for them; I knew you would let us go.’

Mrs. Kage leaned back on the sofa, her mind relieved. For Caroline to fall in love where there was no money, would have been intolerable—her own fate enacted over again; but Leta Canterbury was different. If she and Thomas Kage chose to

lapse into a liking for each other, why, they must get out of it again in the best way they could. Selfish, selfish woman!

‘Yes,’ she said; ‘I don’t mind your going for a sail, with Sarah to chaperone you, should the sea be calm. I suppose he understands the management of boats.’

CHAPTER II.

DOWN AT CHILLING.

A STATELY mansion bordering upon Wales, and resting on a gentle eminence, was the far-famed residence of George Canterbury. Its description must be deferred to a later chapter. Through the open park, across the stately terraces, up the broad steps into the spacious hall, we must go now.

The view commanded from the windows was beautiful. Sunshiny dales, sheltering woods, silvery brooks of water, that murmured as they ran gently through mossy glens, trees waving in the breeze, hills with their light and shade ever changing — giving to an imaginative mind pictures of the flowery plains of Arcadia.

In one of the various rooms that opened on either side the hall, was the eldest daughter of George Canterbury. The room was of magnificent proportions; she was as a magnificent queen in it. Her gleaming silk swept the ground as she stood, tall and upright, before the window, her head held

a little back, its natural position. She was rather a large woman, with a comely face of power, and clearly-cut features; her hair was of a purple black, her eyes were dark gray. The landscape on which she looked was no summer scene of green glade and gladness; far and near it was one white spotless plain of snow. The January sun shone brightly, the glad robins piped from the snowy trees.

‘I think we shall have a thaw,’ she observed to her sister Jane, who sat at the table writing.

Jane Canterbury looked up from her desk. ‘I hope not. I do so dislike a thaw.’

‘So do I; but it is an evil that must follow snow, and the sooner it’s over the better.’

‘Have you any message to Lydia?’

‘No; only my love. I wrote to her yesterday.’

Jane Canterbury dipped her pen in the ink, but did not immediately resume her writing. She glanced again at her sister.

‘Do you know, I think that their not coming down for Christmas has made a very disagreeable impression on papa. I mean Lydia and her husband.’

‘Disagreeable! In what way?’ asked Miss Canterbury. ‘They could not help it. He was too ill to come.’

‘Of course. Papa does not blame them. He

began talking about it yesterday evening when you were at the rectory, saying that the break-up of the family Christmas party looked like a foreshadowing of the breaking up of the family.'

'That was done, so to say, when Edgar died, counting from the year that we lost mamma,' observed Miss Canterbury, in the low steady tone with which she had schooled herself to mention her dead brother's name.

'I said so to papa nearly in the same words,' returned Jane, 'and he began to cry a little. I think—I think—'

'What do you think, Jane?' asked Miss Canterbury wonderingly, for Jane's hesitation had come to a final pause.

'Well, I cannot help thinking that papa is not quite so strong as he was,' was Jane's answer, given with a good deal of deprecation. 'In vigour of mind; I do not mean in health.'

Miss Canterbury made no answer. Of clear and vigorous intellect herself, of quick perception and sound common sense, she, dutiful and loving daughter though she was, could not be ignorant that Mr. Canterbury's intellect had been all his life but commonplace. She bent forward as if something in the white landscape had attracted her attention, and before the silence was broken, Millicent entered with her walking-things on.

‘Where are you going, Leta?’ asked the elder sister in a tone of authority.

‘O, to five hundred places.’

‘In this snow?’

‘As if it would hurt me, Miss Canterbury! I like walking in the snow above everything.’

‘Do you, young lady! I hope you have good snow-boots on.’

Leta held up one foot with a laugh to show how thick the boots were. She wore a pretty bonnet of bright violet, some white-blonde lace shading and setting off the fair, delicate cheeks, and sweet hazel eyes. Her dress was violet; her black-velvet mantle was edged with some kind of rare fur.

‘And where are the five hundred places?’

‘As if I could enumerate them all!’ returned Leta lightly. ‘The rectory will be the first, and the schools the next, and then Mrs. Kage’s, and then—I think papa wants a message taken to old Fry’s,’ she broke off; ‘I am going to ask him. Good-bye.’

‘You must be home to luncheon, Leta.’

‘O yes, if I can. If not, please put by a piece of bread-and-butter for me.’

Leta shut the door, and crossed the hall to her father’s study. George Canterbury—a tall, thin, fair man, some years turned sixty—sat reading

near the fire, in his spectacles. His auburn hair was thinning rapidly; in fact, not to mince the matter, the top of his head was getting bald; and the crows'-feet were deepening round the corners of his eyes. All of which troubled Mr. Canterbury; he had been a vain man all his life, and would be to its end. The thin face was handsome still, though not displaying any great strength of intellect. The nose and mouth were beautifully formed, but the forehead receded much. His daughters Jane and Millicent would have been very like him but for this last defect, which their faces did not possess.

'Papa, don't you want some message taken to John Fry?' inquired Leta.

'No, my dear, not now,' replied Mr. Canterbury, putting aside his newspaper, and turning his kindly blue eyes on her; 'I have sent Neel to him.'

'O, very well; that will be one place less, then.'

'You will call at the parsonage, Millicent, and see how the poor old man is.'

'I am going there first, papa.'

'Do so, child. And if he would like some grapes, or some—'

'O papa, Miss Canterbury, you know, remembers all that,' was Leta's interruption.

They were in the habit, in a playful kind of way, of calling the elder sister 'Miss Canterbury.'

'Yes, I hope so. I think I'll step down myself presently; the snow's not very bad between here and the parsonage. Tell them I'm coming.'

'Very well, papa. Good-bye.'

Her other calls made, Leta Canterbury turned to the residence of Mrs. Kage, a small, pretty villa-cottage, with low French windows. Caroline saw her coming, and ran out regardless of the snow, shaking a shower of it from the laurels as she brushed past them. Her dark-blue eyes were animated; her cheeks as bright as a June rose.

'What good fairy sent you here, Leta?'

'The fairy was myself. Why?'

'He is come!' whispered Caroline.

'Who?'

'Who! As if you needed to ask. He came down to Aberton on business yesterday, and walked here this morning.'

With a bright blood-red flush rising to her face—with a sudden coursing-on of every vein and pulse—with a sweet feeling of intense bliss, as if heaven had opened to her, Millicent Canterbury stood for a moment speechless. Caroline laughed. The like emotion had been hers but an hour ago, at the unexpected appearance of Thomas Kage: and she did not mistake its signs in another.

In later years, when certain events in the chances and changes of life plunged Caroline, young still, into awful misery and brought her very near the grave, a remembrance of the deliberate deceit she had practised on Millicent Canterbury was not the least amidst the catalogue of errors that stung her conscience. From the night at the seaside, when she had given the lying hint to her mother, Caroline had set herself, after the manner of girls, to tease Leta about Thomas Kage. 'He loves you,' was her reiterated whisper; and Millicent, covered with blushes, never dreamt that she was being purposely deceived. Caroline was playing the false part still, now and always.

A matter of moment connected with Mr. Kage's profession had brought him down to Aberton, a large town about three miles' distance from Chilling, and he took the opportunity to walk over. On his way to the presence of Caroline the snowy road seemed but as a soft carpet of velvet. How his heart had fed on her image since they parted in October, he would not have liked the world to know. Mrs. Kage, treating the visit as one of common courtesy, paid solely from the accident of his being in the neighbourhood, and never supposing but that her daughter looked upon it with similar indifference, received him civilly, and con-

descended to inquire with quite a show of interest after the health of Lady Kage.

She was sitting back on her comfortable sofa, drawn to the fire, when Millicent went in; a soft down cushion covered with embroidered silk was at her back, another beside her; her scent-bottles lay on the pretty little coffee-table at hand; a pastile burnt in a saucer, making the room smell like a Roman-Catholic oratory. Thomas Kage, taking his elbow from the mantelpiece, advanced to shake hands with Millicent. She met him with a flushed, conscious, downcast face, and stood in shyness and silence.

‘I am so glad to see you,’ he said in his cordial, earnest tone, for Millicent was a great favourite of his. ‘I am here but for an hour.’

‘You timed your visit well, Miss Millicent,’ spoke Mrs. Kage, languidly playing with the chain of her eye-glass. ‘Did you come on purpose, knowing Mr. Kage would be here?’

‘No, indeed,’ replied Millicent vehemently, half-crying with confusion at the sudden charge. ‘I did not think—I did not know anything about Mr. Kage. I came for my music.’

Thomas Kage laughed at the eagerness, but suspected not that there could be a cause for it. Caroline—false girl!—telegraphed a meaning look to her mother, as much as to say she did not be-

lieve the denial. Leta turned her hot face to the piano, and kept her back to them.

‘Can you let me have the music, Caroline?’ she asked, touching some pieces that lay there. ‘Olive accuses me of having lent it to you to avoid practising it myself; she knows I dislike difficult pieces.’

‘I don’t think you have any very great talent for music, my dear Miss Millicent,’ observed Mrs. Kage, lifting her thin white hand with its glittering rings. ‘It is a great gift—peculiar, I may almost say, to the Gunse family, for we all had it largely, —as your mother knew,’ looking at Thomas Kage, ‘when she was governess at Sir Charles’s. Caroline inherits it from me.’

‘I am sure I have not any gift at all for music,’ spoke Leta readily, turning her ingenuous and truthful face to them for a moment. ‘All that I know of it has had to be drilled into me.’

‘As Miss Carr had to drill it, at the time I speak of, into Charlotte Kage,’ murmured the lady.—‘Do sit down, Millicent love. How is dear Mr. Canterbury?’

‘He is quite well, thank you,’ answered Millicent. ‘Mr. Annesley is worse. Sarah is in—so much distress.’

The pause was caused by the remembrance of something she had just heard at the rectory against

Mrs. Kage. Sarah Annesley had called her false and deceitful: and Millicent, sensitive and ever considerate to others, felt as guilty, face to face with Mrs. Kage, as though she had made the charge herself.

‘O, poor old duck! we heard he was worse. But you know he is seventy-five, so his time has come, I suppose. Even parsons can’t expect to live for ever.—Can they, Thomas?’

‘Why, no, Mrs. Kage; and none should know that more certainly than Mr. Annesley. By all I have heard of him—of his good, humble, useful life—there can be few better prepared to welcome death than he.’

Mrs. Kage threw her eyes across at the speaker—a shrewd look of curiosity in their depths.

‘Where have *you* heard of old Annesley? O, I forgot—from his daughter.’

‘No, Mrs. Kage; I have been in the habit of hearing of Parson Annesley—it is what my good friend always calls him—long before I met his daughter last autumn. I speak of Mrs. Garston.’

‘Deaf old Worry!’ faintly aspirated Mrs. Kage. ‘I give you my word, Thomas, that the half-hours’ visits I paid to that antediluvian fossil at Little Bay upset my nerves for three days. Caroline knows it; Millicent Canterbury, my dear love, *you*

know it. What ill fate sent her to the same identical seaside place that I chose, I am unable to imagine.'

'Mrs. Garston came to Little Bay because my mother was there.'

'O!' said Mrs. Kage frigidly. 'How Sarah Annesley could go to sit with her day after day, and survive it, was to me a marvel.—Do unscrew this difficult stopper for me, Thomas; my fingers are unequal to it.'

Holding out the bottle to him with those same fingers of affectation, Thomas Kage took out the stopper and returned it to her. She fluttered a few drops of its pungent essence on the carpet. And thus talking, and some three of them, at least, feeling as if that little parlour were a haven of Eden, twenty minutes wore away.

Millicent, not liking, in her self-consciousness, to stay longer, took her leave. Mr. Kage attended her to the door, and thence walked with her along the path to open the gate.

'The next time I come down, I hope to have the honour of calling on the Miss Canterburys,' he said, as he shook her hand. 'I feel ashamed not to do so now, but time will not permit it.'

'You are going back to Aberton soon?'

'As soon as I have been to the rectory. I am compelled to call there, short though my time is;

for I promised Mrs. Garston to do so, and take her back news of Mr. Annesley.

‘Will you give my kind regards to her?’ spoke Millicent gently. ‘I think she is a very worthy old lady, in spite of her peculiarities.’

‘Yes, she is.’

‘And I should like to send my love to your mother,’ added Millicent, blushing a little.

‘Thank you. Until my next visit, then.’

‘Perhaps you will never make another!’ Leta stayed to say, her sweet face turned to him rather wistfully.

‘Indeed I shall, and very shortly too. The business that has brought me down to Aberton now must bring me again soon, when I will try not to be so tied for time. Fare you well, dear Miss Canterbury!’

He lifted his hat, and Millicent walked away, carrying the piece of music, a whole flood-tide of sunshine making glad her beating heart.

CHAPTER III.

WITH LADY KAGE.

APART from the crowd of lofty and pretentious houses sprung up of late years in the region that somebody has called 'Westburnia,' stand two dwellings smaller and prettier, each in the midst of its garden, and almost under the very wing of that aristocratic place, Paradise-square. These two houses had not kept pace with others in grandeur. They had a kind of plain, old, and staid look, answering no doubt to their respective occupants, who had been in them years before the fashionable squares and terraces around were built or thought of. In the one lived Mrs. Garston, in the other Lady Kage. They were held on long leases, and the rents were low. Doubtless the landlord was ready to eat his finger-ends with mortification, at seeing the great rents exacted by others for houses, not half as good as these in point of real comfort and convenience. Mrs. Garston remained in hers from habit, from past asso-

ciations. Her fortune brought her in nearly three thousand a-year, and the house was entirely out of proportion with such an income as that; but she would as soon have thought of changing her skin as her dwelling. She kept six servants indoors, and a large close carriage and a coachman in Paradise-mews. Several rooms had been built out at the back of her house at her own expense, otherwise some of the six servants might have lacked dormitories. It is not with Mrs. Garston, however, that we have to do just now, but with Lady Kage.

Her income has been already mentioned,—a few hundreds a-year, all told,—and it would die with her. Thomas Kage made a little, after his chamber and other expenses were paid; and he took it home and threw it into the common fund. They had kept two servants; but since Lady Kage grew worse another was taken on; and Dorothy attended solely to the comforts of her mistress.

Seven o'clock, London time, on a January evening, and two very charming concomitants for London streets—a thaw and a fog. Thomas Kage, arriving at home from that brief visit of his to Aberton, mentioned in the last chapter, thought it about one of the most disagreeable nights he had ever experienced as he sprung out of the hansom with his small black travelling-bag. Letting

himself in with his latchkey, he turned into the dining-room, where he expected to find his mother. The empty chair, however—her own chair in the warmest corner—struck upon him with a kind of foreboding chill.

‘Where’s my mother?’ he asked of a servant-maid who came running up.

‘My lady is not quite so well, sir,’ was the answer. ‘She has not been down at all to-day. Dorothy thinks it’s this nasty weather that’s trying her. O sir, and if you please,’ added the girl, as he was making his way to the staircase, ‘Mrs. Garston’s footman has been here to ask you to be kind enough to step in as soon as you got back.’

Lady Kage was in the small sitting-room above, cheerful with fire and two wax-candles. A gray chenille shawl lay on the back of her easy-chair; a small cap of white lace shaded her delicate face, which grew bright at the entrance of her son—her good, noble, loving son—who had never in his whole life brought to her one moment’s pain. He kissed his mother fondly, and then sat down by her.

‘And now what is this great matter, that my mother should be up here this evening?’ he asked in a light, almost a joking tone; for he knew how strangely impressionable to outer influences her spirits had of late been.

‘My breath has been so bad to-day, Thomas.’

And as she spoke he became conscious that the breath (not very free for a long while) was remarkably short. Thomas did not like this.

He drew a chair to the fire, railed a little at the fog, thick enough to affect anybody’s breath, and at what he called the slush, and then passed to the topic of his late visit, and the business that had induced it, of which Lady Kage was cognisant.

‘Will you be able to succeed in it, Thomas?’

‘Yes. But I shall have to go down again, I expect, more than once.’

‘And Mrs. Kage is well?—And Caroline?’

‘Mrs. Kage is blooming, and greater in essences and affectation than ever.’

‘Thomas!’ spoke his mother, with a reproving smile.

‘Well, it is not a libel.’

‘You saw Caroline?’

‘I saw Millicent Canterbury also. She asked me to give her love to you.’

‘You ought⁷ to have called on the Canterburys, Thomas.’

‘If I had, I should not have been back to-day; and I did not care to leave you alone for two nights, mother mine. I saw Mr. Canterbury at

the parsonage, and said I would call the next time I went down.'

Dorothy came in, grim as usual, to tell him his dinner was waiting downstairs. 'Which it was nothing but two mutton-chops and mashed potatoes,' she added, for they had not been certain of his getting home. Thomas Kage ran down to the potatoes and chops as contentedly as he would have done to a rich repast,—he had been brought up to be thankful,—and then, mindful of Mrs. Garston's message, went in to the next door.

Mrs. Garston was in her drawing-room: a tall, deaf old lady, with vigorous gray eyes, large features and an irritable temper; her dress, of rich white brocade silk, with a small running pattern on it of bright-coloured flowers, stood out stiffly, and her head-dress was of black velvet and pearls; all of a bygone fashion, like herself. She had heard from her servants of Mr. Kage's arrival at home, and had sat bolt upright in her chair ever since, expecting him; her gold-headed stick, with which she supported her steps in walking, resting as usual against her. She took it in her hand when he entered, and began to tap the carpet; by which signs Thomas knew that she was not in a genial humour.

'So! You have come, have you? And taken your time over it.'

It was rather by guess than ear that Thomas Kage caught the sense of the words. Mrs. Garston's eighty years had rendered her toothless; and she would no more have allowed the loss to be artificially supplied than she would have submitted to the wrongest thing invented by Satan. Putting aside any pain there might be to the gums in fixing them, she looked upon false teeth as one of the world's new and reprehensible sins.

He took her hand in his as he sat down close to her, his kindly, honest dark eyes looking pleasantly into her sharp ones of steel-gray. In his slow, distinct, impressive tones, heard by her distinctly, he explained that he had sat a little while with his mother, whom he had found worse, and stayed to eat his dinner after his long journey, before coming in; and it disarmed her anger.

‘Is anything fresh ailing your mother?’

‘Her breath is laboured,’ spoke Thomas in her ear, ‘and she seems very low this evening. Dorothy thinks it may be the effect of the weather; I hope it is.’

Mrs. Garston gave a violent rap with her stick, which slightly incommoded Thomas Kage, for it struck his foot instead of the floor.

‘What do fogs come for, I should like to know?’

‘I think we should be puzzled to tell.’

‘They are horrible; they affect everybody’s breath: you tell Lady Kage so from me. When I was out in the carriage to-day for my airing, driving round and round Paradise-square—for I’d not let the coachman venture farther in such a mist—I was choked with the damp and fog. Choked, I assure you, Thomas. And, one with bad breath would naturally feel it more than I did. Now, you tell your mother that; do you hear?’

‘I’ll be sure to tell her,’ said Thomas, who was used to Mrs. Garston.

‘Don’t let her get low through a mischievous fog. Lowness is bad for us all, but it must be worse than a dose of physic to Lady Kage. I should not like to have heart-complaint myself, Thomas; though I can’t help saying that what’s called heart-complaint is generally nothing but what comes of nerves and fancy.—Did you see Parson Annesley?’

Thomas Kage answered in the affirmative, and gave her his opinion of the clergyman’s state. The old people had been friends in early life.

‘And so you went to see those Kages!’ commented the unceremonious dame, when she had gathered various items of news in answer to her

questions. '*I shouldn't. They are not worth it, Thomas.*'

'Not worth it, ma'am ?'

'No, not worth it !' she repeated irascibly. 'Why do you contradict ? The mother's a lump of pretension and hypocrisy, and the daughter's a chip of the old block. Now, then !'

Thomas Kage only smiled in answer to her fierce look.

'They are not worthy to bear the same name as your mother ; no, nor as you, Thomas, when you behave yourself. *I* knew the Guneses.—What sort of a provision has Philip Annesley made for his daughter ?'

'I do not know. I never heard anything about it.'

Mrs. Garston grunted : she very much resented any check to her curiosity. Thomas Kage did not mend the feeling by inquiring if she had any news of Barnaby Dawkes.

'Now, don't you bring up Barnaby Dawkes's name to me,' shrieked the old lady, seizing her stick menacingly ; 'I'll not stand it from you, Thomas Kage. He had the impudence to send me a letter to-day, saying he must quit the army and go through the Insolvent-court, unless I paid his debts. What do you think of that for a piece of brass ?'

‘Very wrong, of course,’ murmured Thomas. ‘But perhaps if he were once set straight, he would keep so.’

‘Is it anything to you, pray, that you should take his part?’ she retorted. ‘Are you in league with Barby Dawkes?’

‘Surely not. I scarcely know Captain Dawkes; I have not seen him more than three times in my life.’

‘And that’s three times too often. You keep clear of him, Thomas Kage, or perhaps he may infect you with the propensity of getting into debt. He’s a vain fop, that’s what Barby Dawkes is, and lives in the billiard-room all his spare time. I don’t like him; and I don’t like Keziah. Debts last year, debts this year, debts next year, and then he comes to me to pay them for him! Why does he make them?’

She put the question so pointedly to Thomas Kage, with her keen gaze fixed on his face, that he could only make some kind of answer. He did not know why Captain Dawkes made them.

‘Nor I,’ said Mrs. Garston. ‘But I’ll tell you one thing, Thomas Kage, he will make his debts once too often. There; you may put that down in your diary, if you will, to remind you later that I’ve said it.’

Thomas Kage did not put it in his diary,

scarcely in his memory ; but a time was to come when he would remember it with a shudder, for the prophecy was destined to be awfully fulfilled.

‘What keeps Charlotte away from her mother?’ resumed Mrs. Garston in a fierce tone. ‘Lady Kage told me yesterday she had not seen her for a week.’

‘Charlotte cannot come abroad, just now ; she is always ill, as you know, before her babies are born.’

Mrs. Garston gave a resentful knock in the air at some imaginary object.

‘Babies here, babies there, babies everywhere! How many will this next make?’

‘Nine.’

‘Nine!’ repeated Mrs. Garston, lifting her hands. ‘Why do people have so many children? Where’s the use of it?’

‘I’m sure I can’t tell,’ said Thomas, with a laugh. ‘I have none.’

‘And *don’t* you have any,’ advised the old lady. ‘Don’t you get married, my dear, for you are better off single. With such a mother as yours to come home to, and me next door to talk to at will, you’ve everything you can reasonably want. Wives are but a lottery at best, for I’ll be whipped if the ’cutest men living can tell what they are till they’ve got ’em for better or worse. And

children may turn out spendthrifts like Barnaby Dawkes.'

'Which would not be desirable,' thought Thomas Kage.

'Over and over again I warned Charlotte against that marriage,' resumed Mrs. Garston. 'I told her that where the exchequer was low, children generally arrived in shoals. She did not heed me, and what's the consequence? Don't you go and make a spectacle of yourself, Thomas. Barnaby Dawkes— Who's come with such a noise as that, I should like to know?'

It was a summons at the front-door; a knock and ring so loud and startling as to have penetrated even to the deaf ears. The footman came in, looking a little scared as he spoke to Mr. Kage.

'One of your servants is come to say, sir, that her ladyship's taken worse—if you'd please to go in.'

A parting pressure of the hand, and Thomas Kage was gone, long before his old friend in her impatient flurry comprehended a word.

Lady Kage was lying insensible, and medical aid was summoned. It was but a prolonged fainting-fit; but, ere the doctor departed, Thomas Kage had learnt the fatal news, that the end, in all probability, could not be retarded beyond many days. It nearly overwhelmed him. He

had known for some time now that the termination must be fatal, most likely sudden, but he had not expected it so soon. It is the ordinary case of life's experience. So soon! so soon! He sat by her with his aching heart; but for the strongest efforts of self-control, he must have given way to his emotion.

Lady Kage knew the truth nearly as certainly as he, and did not fail to detect his inward agitation. She seemed quite comfortable again, and sat in her chair just as if nothing had happened, shunning bed as long as might be, for the feeling of suffocation was very strong this evening, and always oppressed her worse when she lay down. Thomas was standing in silence, his eyes fixed on the fire, when she put out her hand to him. He went up and clasped it.

‘What has Dr. Tyndal been saying to you?’ she asked, gazing up to his face with a wan smile, meant to be a cheery one.

The sudden question upset him. By the tone, the manner, he saw she knew the worst. His chest heaved, his lips quivered, and he turned a little from her.

‘Thomas!’

He flung both his hands on his face to hide its pain, and a sharp faint cry involuntarily escaped from him.

‘Thomas, Thomas! My darling son! Do not grieve as though there were no hope.’

She motioned that he should draw his chair close and sit down on it, and their hands were locked together. It had not been hope for this life she spoke of, but for the next. The great love, always existing between them in heart, had been suppressed in manner; they had not been demonstrative the one with the other; this *cannot* be with those of a higher nature, where the feelings are sensitive, true, deep. But on this night, with the great parting brought suddenly close to hand, reserve was thrown aside, and they spoke ‘face to face,’ as though the reticence that pertains to earth had taken wings to itself and flown away. Then, if Thomas Kage had never known it before, he learnt how excellent a son she had ever found him, how truly she had appreciated his goodness, his sacrifices, his never-failing and most considerate love. A quarter of an hour of deep agitation, and Thomas remembered that he must be calm, even to the end, for his mother’s sake. His face had lines in it, his eyes were red, but he sat quietly staring into the fire, her hand held quietly in his, while his heart felt as if it must burst with anguish.

‘I have made my will, Thomas,’ she said, knowing that practical considerations must be

spoken of as well as others. ‘There’s not much to leave, my dear; still, I have been able to put by a little yearly since Charlotte married, and you paid your own expenses. It is about six or seven hundred pounds, I think—it will be that, I mean, when everything is paid; and—Thomas’—Lady Kage spoke hesitatingly and dropped her voice—‘I have left it to Charlotte.’

‘Quite right—quite right,’ he warmly answered. ‘Charlotte wants it; I don’t. I have my profession.’

‘That was what swayed me. I thought it over a long while, prayerfully, trustingly, and I seemed to see that poor Charlotte, with her flock of children and her many needs, had the most right to it. But O, my son, my good son! what can I leave to you?’

A great sob escaped him, and his eyelashes were wet as he turned them to her.

‘Leave me your blessing, mother.’

‘You have it always; my heart is blessing you every hour of its existence. And if I may be permitted to look down from there’ (glancing upwards), ‘it will bless you still. Be at ease, my dear son: a better blessing than mine is yours—God’s.’

He suddenly knelt down by the fire and poked it violently—anything to carry off the emotion that

was stirring him so terribly within. And then he threw his arm across his mother's lap, and hid his face upon it.

'Do not sorrow as those without hope,' she whispered; 'do not mourn as those who have no comforter. Where will be the profit of my daily patient teaching, Thomas, if you are to give way under this blow?'

'It is so sudden.'

'Nay, you cannot have failed to know that death was coming.'

'But not so soon—not so soon. Mother! I don't know how to bear it.'

'You cannot think, Thomas, how quickly my life seems to have passed since that brief period of time into which all momentous events for me were crowded: my marriage, your birth, and your father's death. Looking back, it seems to be as yesterday. So—quickly—will your life pass; and then we shall be reunited where there can be no more parting.'

She could feel the inward sobbing as he leaned against her. The tears gathered in her own eyes, and dropped on his head as she looked down at him.

'Heaven knows how I have striven to work on, patiently and silently, for the goal,' she said. 'In the midst of all my shortcomings and mistakes

and sins, I have ever tried to keep the end in view, and to bear on for it. It has not been in vain,' she softly whispered. 'O, Thomas, I have been so helped!—so helped! I do not presume to say, with St. Paul, that "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness;" but I dare to hope and say that I shall live amidst the redeemed in heaven. And the time of my departure is at hand.'

If ever there had been a true humble Christian in the world, it was Maria Kage. Thomas knew how sure all this was; but the bitter pain of parting filled his heart, and he could not find comfort. *That* would come later, when all should be over and the anguish in a degree gone by; but he did not see it now.

'I should like you to keep on the home and old Dorothy, Thomas,' Lady Kage resumed, as he sat up in his chair again: 'at least for a year. She will keep things straight for you; so that, in that respect, you will not so much miss me.'

Even in the midst of his distress, the thought crossed him that he should be little likely to retain the home and Dorothy, wanting means; but he did not say this; he could not speak.

'I wish you would not grieve so.'

'My grief is so bitter that I could almost wish to go with you. O mother, say you forgive me

for the pain I have caused you, wilfully or thoughtlessly ; for all moments of ingratitude ; for the want of love, that has been so poor to what it ought to have been !'

She took his hands, and bent down to him, a tender light in her earnest eyes.

' I forgive you for all, Thomas. I say it to satisfy you. But none can know better than you how little there is to forgive ; I can recall nothing. You have been my dutiful, loving, thoughtful son ; not to me only, but in the sight of heaven.'

' Don't, mother !'

His tone was one of imploring anguish. In that moment, when she to whom he had been so closely knit was about to be taken from his sight for ever in this world, it seemed that he had not loved her and cherished her and worked for her half enough.

' God's ways and will are not as ours, Thomas, or I could have wished to live until I saw you more prosperous.'

' Do not be anxious for me,' was the hasty answer. ' I have no fear of getting on.'

' If I could be anxious for you, I should think my own life's lessons had been in vain. I leave you with entire trust ; and be assured, Thomas, that you will get on just as much and just as little as God shall please.'

He knew that.

‘I have never once asked for riches for you, Thomas,’ she said in a deeper whisper; ‘I have been content to leave that to Higher wisdom than mine. It is the other kind of riches I have besought for you—O, very earnestly—those that will serve you when the gold of this world shall have flown away.’

A glow of sweet gladness, not lost immediately in the hour’s sorrow, illumined his heart. He had full faith in the great belief that the child of a praying mother would never be lost.

‘Do you remember the words of that verse in *Sintram*, Thomas—the one you used to be so fond of?’

He knew which she meant, and nodded. They ran through his mind rapidly as she spoke.

‘My Lord and God, I pray,
Turn from his heart away
This world’s turmoil;
And call him to Thy light,
Be it through sorrow’s might,
Through pain or toil.’

‘It is *that* that has been rather my chief prayer for you,’ she breathed. ‘Thomas, should it come—pain, toil, sorrow, whatever trouble may be deemed necessary for you—you will not fail; you will bear up bravely, looking to the end?’

‘Yes,’ he clearly answered, ‘God helping me.’

‘It seems so little when you have passed through,’ she began again, after a long pause. ‘The cares, griefs, perplexities, distress, that appear so terrible to us at the time as hardly to be borne, seem as nothing looked back to when life is closing. O Thomas, battle with the storm-waves as you best can; they must assail you sooner or later. Bear up manfully, never sinking, looking aloft always to the light that cannot fail. The waves that feel so cruel in the breasting them, are only sent to carry you onwards. No cross, no crown.’

‘I know,’ he whispered; ‘yes.’

‘I shall be in heaven waiting for you; waiting until your appointed labour shall be done, and life’s sun has set. Thomas, I had a dream this afternoon when I dropped asleep in the twilight, and I thought I was in a vast space of subdued, beautiful light, where all seemed to be rest and happiness. Crowds were moving about in white robes; a great river ran along below; bright green trees and lovely-coloured flowers clustering on either side it. It was heaven, Thomas; it was heaven. I saw myself—*saw* myself from a distance, as it seemed—in white as the rest were, like an angel. I was looking down, watching for some one who was to come from very far, some one who was sure to come; for I saw the glad

smile of welcome on my face. Thomas, I know that was you.'

It was getting almost more than Thomas Kage could bear. He doubted also whether it was not for his mother, though she seemed so calm, with a glad, steady peace inward and outward.

'I know that dream was sent to comfort me, my son, to reconcile me to the parting. I am going to heaven. Just so shall I watch there in reality until you come to me. It will not be long; time passes so quickly.'

'My darling mother, say no more to-night,' he urged, putting his cheek against hers; 'we will talk again to-morrow.'

'I think I have said nearly all. You will step round to Charlotte's. Tell her that I am a little worse, and if she can possibly come to me in the morning, to do so. Read first.'

'Do you care that I should read to-night?'

'I shall care for it to the end, Thomas.'

Since Lady Kage's illness it had been his turn to read; but he verily believed he should break down to-night. To attempt more than a few verses he dared not. It was chance more than anything else that caused him to begin where he did.

'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that

ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

‘For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.’

And so on to the end of the chapter. After that, he closed the book.

“‘Ever be with the Lord!’ repeated Lady Kage in a low tone; and she took his hands, and looked into his eyes with a great gladness while she said it.

‘For ever and ever, please God!’

But, nevertheless, it was a curious chance that caused Thomas Kage to fix upon those particular verses that night.

CHAPTER IV.

KEZIAH DAWKES.

IN her square, comfortable, but rather small dining-room, with its thick purple Turkey carpet, and sideboard of glittering plate at her back, sat Mrs. Garston in her arm-chair, bolt upright. She wore the stiffest of black silks, and a head-gear of quilled white net and love-ribbon, being in mourning for her many-years' friend and neighbour, Lady Kage. By the position she sat in, rigidly perpendicular, those accustomed to her moods might have seen that something had put her out of humour. Though, indeed, so far as speech went, it was not very often she could have been said to be *in* it.

Opposite to her, on the other side the hearth-rug, was a plain young woman in fashionable attire. She had a gray, cold face, dusky rather than clear, and wide-open green eyes, with brown spots in them. It was Miss Dawkes. The grandmother of Miss Dawkes' and Mrs. Garston's husband had

been brother and sister ; so that the old lady stood to the younger in the affinity of great-aunt. And when aunts (or uncles either) possess a large fortune, with freedom to will it away at pleasure, their relatives to the nine-and-ninetieth degree do not fail to gather about them, like a flock of hungry ravens waiting for food.

To give Miss Dawkes her due, it must be confessed that not from any expectation of benefiting herself had she come forth to invade Mrs. Garston that winter day, genial in temperature as one of spring. Mrs. Garston did not like to be invaded by Miss Dawkes. And Miss Dawkes knew it ; for the ancient lady contrived to let her likes and dislikes be known without the smallest scruple. She had come to plead the cause of her brother, Captain Dawkes ; to endeavour to conciliate Mrs. Garston's anger against him, and, if possible, get her to pay his debts.

To possess a kinsman from whom we have 'expectations' is not always a good thing. No, not even when the money cannot fail to become ours in the due course of events. The fact sometimes works badly. It had in the case of Captain Dawkes. But for looking to Mrs. Garston's wealth, assuming that it must, or at least a large portion of it, inevitably descend to him, he might never have grown into the fast spendthrift that he was.

The clear-sighted old lady saw this ; and perhaps that caused her to be more lenient to his faults than she would otherwise have been. There was little that she did not see ; her vigorous intellect went deep into things passing around her, and grasped their points unerringly.

‘ I wonder you have the face to come to me, Keziah ! When I was your age, fifty years ago, I’d have hid myself in a bag, head downwards, first. You want a year of thirty yet, you know. Manners are changed nowadays. Children are young women, and young women are bolder than old ones.’

Keziah Dawkes murmured some deprecating reply in the lowest of tones. Mrs. Garston saw that words came from her lips, but she could not by any possibility have heard their purport. And Keziah intended this : nothing, as she knew, so aggravated the old lady as opposing answers. It was rare indeed that Miss Dawkes did anything without a purpose ; wary, cold, cautious, she weighed life’s chances deliberately.

‘ If he has thrust one letter upon me, he has thrust half-a-dozen. The first came three weeks ago. I didn’t answer it. I didn’t answer any of ’em, and so he keeps on writing. What do you think of that for impudence ?’

‘ Dear Aunt Garston, it is the fact of your not

answering that has caused him to write again and again.'

Had any sensitive stranger been present, he might have started at Miss Dawkes's voice. It sounded like a gruff man's, and was very harsh. These voices are not pleasant to the ear; we are apt to think that they carry their index with them. A sweet voice has been called an excellent thing in woman: it is so in more senses of the word than the one generally understood, whether possessed by woman or by man.

Mrs. Garston seized her stick, and gave a thump on the floor that might have dented-in the board but for the intervening carpet.

'How many times have I paid Barby's debts? Answer me that.'

But Miss Dawkes kept a wise silence.

'Twice over I have settled his whole catalogue of liabilities, and set him straight with the world; fifteen times at the least I have paid stray ones for him. What is the use of it, Keziah?'

It may be, that to this Miss Dawkes had no satisfactory answer to make. A faint red, dark and dusky, tinged her cheeks.

'The oftener I pay, the oftener I may pay; and where, I ask, is it to end? It is doing him no good, Keziah. You see that for yourself, you know, and yet you come pestering me. If he were

put straight to-morrow, the next day he would begin to pile up debts again. The best thing for Barby, the kindest thing, will be to do no more for him. If once I say I won't, I *won't*! Mark you that.'

'But you will not say it, dear Aunt Garston; you will not in justice say it!' And Miss Dawkes in her eagerness rose and crossed the hearthrug, her petitioning hands held out.

'Keep your seat, if you please, Keziah.'

'I—I thought perhaps you would hear me better if I sat nearer to you, Aunt Garston.'

'I hear you quite well enough. You want me to pay Barby's debts: there's no fear I shouldn't hear that. And I say, Keziah Dawkes, you are bold to ask it. What do you mean by "justice"? I heard that, you see.'

'He has been taught to consider himself your heir, Aunt Garston.'

'My bear!'

'Heir. I said heir.'

'Has he? Who taught him?'

'Everybody. My father and mother, while they lived.'

'A man called yesterday, Keziah Dawkes, saying he wished to see me on business, and was shown in—here, to this very dining-room. He asked for a five-guinea subscription to some

improvements they want to set afoot in the garden of Paradise-square. When I told him I'd not give five shillings let alone five guineas, that the Paradise-garden improvements were nothing to me, he began to resent it, saying the committee had *counted* upon my help because I was rich, and they had put my name down for the amount. Do you consider I was responsible for that, Keziah ?

'Acquainted with your well-known benevolence, they—'

'I ask you if you think I was responsible for what the committee chose to do without my knowledge ?' shrieked Mrs. Garston, rapping violently.

'No. Certainly not.'

'Very well. It is an example in point. I was not responsible for what your folks did when they taught Barnaby Dawkes to think himself my heir.'

'My father, had he lived, would have been your heir.'

'What ?' asked Mrs. Garston, bending her deaf ear.

'I spoke of papa, Aunt Garston. He was to have been your heir, had he survived you.'

'That's as it might have been. He would have come in for a share. But you may remember one fact, Keziah—your father would not have made ducks and drakes of it.'

Keziah knew that. Her father's temperament had been cold, cautious, self-denying, as was her own.

'Your father's mother was my husband's sister; but the money I enjoy comes from my side, not his; it is my own. Therefore, your family have no *right* to it, Keziah. We were friendly with your father, and I should not have forgotten him substantially in my will. But to say that Barby has any claim to consider himself my heir, is a fallacy. Do you hear?—a fallacy.'

'If Barnaby cannot be helped, he must go through the Insolvent-court,' spoke Miss Dawkes.

'And a good thing for him. 'Twould take down his consequence a notch or two.'

'But think of the disgrace to the name, Aunt Garston.'

'It wouldn't be my name,' returned the shrewd old lady. 'His own and yours; but not mine.'

Miss Dawkes began to think that she should be worsted in the argument. Mrs. Garston, searching her with her keen steel eyes, saw it.

'There is no earthly thing you care for in this mortal world, Keziah, except that brother of yours; apart from him, you hold no interest in it. There's only three years' difference in your ages, for he'll be six-and-twenty next month; but you seem to regard him with the indulgent love

of a mother rather than of a sister. Does it do him good ?

‘It does not do him harm.’

‘I say it does do him harm. You don’t see his faults ; and that encourages him in his reckless folly. Whether you can’t see them, or whether you wink at them, I don’t pretend to judge ; the result is the same : most likely it’s something of both. He goes on spending, and you go on winking.’

‘His means are so very shallow, Aunt Garston ; the merest trifle, except his pay.’

‘I know his brains are shallow. You need not tell it me.’

‘His means, I said : his income. How can he keep straight upon it ?’

‘How does Thomas Kage, at the next door, keep straight upon a tithe of it ?’ demanded Mrs. Garston, growing fierce. ‘Why, because he knows that he *must*. Don’t attempt to play the sophist with me, Keziah Dawkes ; it will not answer. If Barnaby had not me and my purse to turn to, he’d live within his income.’

Miss Dawkes, in her private opinion, thought that was likely. At the same time, she deemed it most unreasonable and unjust for Barnaby to be expected to live within it, considering that Mrs. Garston and her purse were there. The old lady

held up the forefinger of her right hand, glittering with diamonds of the first water.

‘Listen to me, Keziah. I have no wish to see Barnaby go to the dogs. He is a kinsman, and I’d rather he turned out respectably. The tack he is on is the *wrong* tack; and neither you nor I can see where it will lead him to. Let him change it; he is young enough to do so yet. But if it is persevered in till thirty’s turned, the chances are that his spendthrift habits will so have mastered him that he must indulge them at any cost. Tell him this; impress it upon his mind: *let him get out of them while he may*. Heaven alone knows what the cost might be.’

Could there have been a prevision in Mrs. Garston’s mind as she said this? It really seemed (as things were to turn out in the future) that it was so; that she saw, as in a mirror, the chain of events to come.

Miss Dawkes saw something quite different, which she looked upon as prophetic: that by the time Barnaby was thirty years of age, the old lady before her would have ceased to count years, and he be in the full enjoyment of her large fortune. In spite of these restive interludes on the part of Mrs. Garston, neither she nor her brother entertained much doubt that the money would come to him. The only doubt attaching

to the matter was, how he should carry on until then.

‘For this one time, dear Aunt Garston! You will help him this one time? He is almost afraid to be in the streets, lest he should get arrested.’

‘Dissected! Who is going to dissect him?’

‘Arrested. Arrested, and put in prison.’

‘Prison, eh? The safest place for him. A month or two of it might bring him to his senses.’

‘And ruin him with his regiment. For this once, dear aunt, in mercy!’

‘I will not listen to any more, Keziah. What you say can make no difference one way or the other, and you had better not put me out of humour. If I pay his debts, I pay them; if I don’t, I don’t: and there’s an end of it. You can stay the day with me if you like, and go upstairs and take your bonnet off.’

Miss Dawkes, knowing the old lady’s moods, looked upon this speech altogether as a kind of concession, and was too wise to mar it. She slowly untied the strings of her bonnet, and rose.

‘I saw Mrs. Annesley at the window as I came by, aunt, and went in for a minute. She says it is feared that Mr. Dunn is dying.’

‘Which of them?’

‘The member, Herbert.’

Mrs. Garston bent her ear.

‘Richard Dunn was here three nights ago, with a shocking bad cold. I hope it’s not him.’

‘It is Herbert, aunt—the one who married Miss Lydia Canterbury.’

‘And a fine tossed-off, bold-speaking thing *she* is!’ pronounced Mrs. Garston, rapping violently. ‘Herbert Dunn brought her here to call after they were married; and, before she had well got out of the house again, she called me a scarecrow. A deaf old scarecrow! I heard of it; and I told Dicky of it, that he might let his brother know. I’m sorry for Herbert, but I’ve not encouraged his wife here. What’s the matter with him?’

‘He has been ill since before Christmas, Mrs. Annesley says—seriously so. But danger was not thought of.’

‘And who says there’s danger now?’

‘There’s great danger, aunt. He was taken worse in the night, and Dr. Tyndal was called up. The doctor has desired that his relatives may be summoned; he thinks he is dying.’

‘Dying, dying!’ angrily repeated Mrs. Garston, as if the word offended her. ‘One dying on this side, another born on that! I wonder what the world’s coming to! Charlotte Lowther’s baby arrived this morning; and that makes her ninth.’

‘Charlotte Lowther?’ repeated Miss Dawkes,

not remembering the name; 'who is Charlotte Lowther, aunt?'

'Who is Charlotte Lowther? Why, Thomas Kage's sister: poor Lady Kage's step-daughter, that she brought up like her own, and sacrificed herself to. You never know anybody, Keziah. Ring the bell.'

'We have not had any acquaintance with the Kages, you know, aunt.'

'It was your loss, not theirs. Barby might take a lesson to his profit from Thomas Kage. As to Charlotte, she *would* marry Bob Lowther, and she has got her troubles through it. The man is a good husband, I believe; but I question if he makes more than six or seven hundred a-year, and everybody knows how far that goes in London.'

'I remember now. He is a civil engineer.'

'He is as civil as you, at any rate,' retorted Mrs. Garston. 'Robert Lowther's a favourite of mine.'

'I did not say he was uncivil, aunt.'

'O, didn't you, though! I know your sneering ways, Keziah. There's nobody in the world good enough to tie Barby's shoe. You'd like to tell it me to my face. Ring that bell again.'

The entrance of the servant prevented the necessity. Mrs. Garston wanted her carriage round without delay. The man felt a little surprised at

receiving the order, for it was earlier than she usually went out, but retired to transmit it.

‘I am going round to Paradise-square,’ she explained to her grandniece. ‘Herbert Dunn’s wife is not a courteous woman, but that’s no reason why I should not inquire after him. I shall come back to luncheon; and if you like to take an airing with me afterwards, Keziah, you can.’

The carriage (a very handsome equipage, with a pair of fine white horses) came to the gate; and Mrs. Garston, in her black bonnet and black-silk cloak, stepped into it, and was driven away.

Warm sunshine lay on the pavements; London, for once, looked bright; some little sparrows were gaily twittering beneath the roofs, in the delusive belief that the biting frosts of winter had flown away, never to come back again.

Keziah unceremoniously drew Mrs. Garston’s arm-chair in front of the fire, and put her feet on the fender. That things would go on all right, she entertained no doubt; really to fear so great a catastrophe as that they would *not*, never seriously entered her thoughts; only, Barby would have to be cautious how he played his cards. In the main, Keziah wished her brother would be careful in many more things than he was at present given to be.

‘The old woman is right, after all,’ soliloquised

she. 'Barby only gets his debts settled that he may be at liberty to contract more. If he had *not* her fortune in prospective, it might be a bad look-out, unless he ceased spending; but he has it; she could not for shame leave it away from him, neither would she. He is the only male representative of the family living, and—'

'Captain Dawkes, ma'am.'

The only male representative of the family came forward at the servant's announcement. To be correct, however, it should be stated that it was the Dawkes family alluded to, not the Garston.

Captain Dawkes was a handsome man—very handsome in his regimentals; not that he wore them to-day. His figure was fine, his features were good, with quite a carmine flush on the cheeks that his black and shining whiskers bordered. On his horse he looked more than well; seen close, as Keziah saw him now, he was less so; for the very dark eyes were too near each other, and the expression of the face was not open—defects which half the world would never detect; and Keziah made one amongst them. Blinded by partiality, she verily believed that had he taken his place amid the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus, the rest would have knelt and done homage to his beauty.

‘Barby, is it you? Why did you come?’

‘To see the grand-aunt. Is the ancient party visible?’

‘She will think it a conspiracy, Barby. I here first, and you next; both of us in one day. Why did you not tell me you were coming here?’

‘I may as well say, “Why did you not tell me you were?”’ returned Captain Dawkes. ‘And with more reason, Keziah; for you generally inform me of your probable movements for the day, and I don’t often know mine.’

Keziah was silent. She had intended this visit of persuasion to be kept secret from Barnaby. For his sake she would have gone to the end of the world barefoot, and thought it no sacrifice. All she could do now was to tell him of the unpropitious mood the ancient lady was betraying, and leave it to his own judgment whether he would remain to see her or not.

‘The fact is, Keziah, things have come to a tolerable crisis,’ observed Captain Dawkes, after listening. ‘The sharks are after me. If it were not for the confounded mess that might come of it, I’d let myself fall into their clutches, and get locked-up for a day and a night. That would bring her to her senses.’

‘I doubt if it would, in the sense you mean. She has been saying the best place for you would

be a prison ; that it would bring *you* to your senses. What are you looking at, Barby ?

Securely sheltered by the window-curtain from outside observation, Captain Dawkes had been peering up the road and down the road to satisfy himself that it was clear.

Keziah a little changed colour.

‘ Surely you do not fear that you have been followed here !’

‘ Not much. It is all right, I see. Been saying a prison is the best place for me, has she ? Considerate old octogenarian ! But that’s only her temper, Keziah. When women get to her age, they say anything. It is so unreasonable !’

‘ What is ?’

‘ To live so long. In the ordinary course of events I ought to have come into my inheritance ten years ago.’

Keziah did not say that Mrs. Garston had just hinted that the inheritance might be none of his, that he had no legal right or claim to it. She spared him when she could ; telling him, of disagreeable news, only what could not be avoided.

‘ How long do you expect her to be away, Keziah ? If I thought it might be better not to see her, why I’d decamp, and come in to-morrow. She—Hallos ! that’s Kage, I think. I want to ask him a question.’

Seizing his hat, Captain Dawkes ran along the garden—for these two houses were built back, not like the modern ones. Thomas Kage was passing on to his own, when he found himself called, and turned to see Barnaby Dawkes. The Captain met him with outstretched hand.

‘I was awfully sorry, old fellow, to hear of your loss,’ he began, the deep-mourning attire reminding him of it. ‘Forgive my laying hold of you in this manner. You know Briscoe, don’t you?’

‘Sam Briscoe? Yes.’

‘Can you give me his address?’

Mr. Kage hesitated, and then told the truth in his straightforward manner.

‘I am not at liberty to give it. Briscoe is in some difficulty, you know.’

‘He’s not in half as much difficulty as I am. Come, let’s have it, Kage.’

‘I cannot, Captain Dawkes. It was by the merest accident that I became acquainted with his present address; he said he must trust to my good-feeling and honour not to disclose it to any man living, though it were his own brother.’

‘Does Briscoe owe you money?’

‘No.’

‘Well, he does me. It’s not much, but upon my word I am so hard up that the smallest sums

are of moment. If Briscoe can pay me, I know he will. I don't want to bother him.'

'Give me a letter for him. I'll forward it at once.'

'Very well ; I'll write it now and send it in to you. But for this cross-grained old grand-aunt of mine turning crusty, I should not need to trouble anybody. It may be a month yet before she comes to ; and that will about land me in the Thames.'

'In the Thames !'

'If I don't get money from somewhere, I must either hang or drown myself. Good-day.'

Captain Dawkes turned in with a look as gloomy as his tone, and Thomas Kage passed on to his home.

Never did he now put the latchkey in the lock and enter, but a feeling of weary desolation shot across his heart, as if the world and the house were alike steeped in gloom that admitted of no enlightenment. However he might temporarily forget his loss abroad, amid the absorbing cares of the day's business, the moment he approached his home it returned to his mind with redoubled force.

It was a curious coincidence that he should have chosen those particular words in the Bible to read to his mother that past night—as already

told of—for they were the last he ever read to her. Lady Kage died that night. When Thomas came back from carrying the news of her increased illness to Mrs. Lowther, Lady Kage was in bed, and seemed quite comfortable. She smiled when he bent over her, saying she felt so easy and happy, just as if she should be quite well in the morning. Thomas kissed her, and said he hoped she would be.

He sat up in her room. He was not easy, and could not leave her. Dorothy resented it: *she* had always sat up with her lady before; things had come to a pretty pass if Mr. Thomas must take her duties on himself. Thomas quietly replied that Dorothy might sit up too, and keep him company if she pleased. Dorothy did not please, and betook herself to an adjoining room in dudgeon.

Lady Kage dropped into a quiet sleep. He sat in the arm-chair, and kept the chamber in stillness, dropping solitary bits of coal on the fire with his noiseless hand. He thought that a night of undisturbed rest might go far to refresh and strengthen her. And the night wore on, and the little hours of the morning struck.

Lady Kage died in her sleep; so peacefully, so calmly, that her faithful son, watching by her side, knew not that the spirit had passed away.

Three weeks had elapsed since. Only three

weeks! And yet it seemed to Thomas Kage, in his grief, that it was nearly half a lifetime.

Closing the hall-door, he turned into the room where they had so often sat together—the dining-parlour. There was nobody to give him a smile of welcome now. The arm-chair stood there as of yore, but it was vacant; vacant for ever.

Dorothy came in, looking rather more grim than usual in her black, to know if he wanted anything. He was left sole executor to his mother, and business connected with the various arrangements had brought him home on occasions in the middle of the day. No, he wanted nothing.

‘Mrs. Lowther’s going on well; and the boy’s as fine a boy as need be; I’ve been round to see,’ jerked out Dorothy, who always seemed to speak as if she were at variance with the world and the listener.

‘I know,’ said Thomas. ‘I called there this morning.’

‘And I’ve took in the news to Mrs. Garston, sir.’

‘All right, Dorothy.’

Dorothy shut the door with a sharp click. And her master, opening a *sécrétaire*, set himself to examine some papers in it. His good countenance was pale to-day; looking like that of a man who had some special grief upon him. Grief it

was, in truth ; he had so tenderly loved his mother. But no remorse was mingled with it. Well would it be for us all had we performed our duties lovingly and faithfully to those gone on before, as had Thomas Kage ! There would be less of bitter regret in the world.

Lady Kage had expressed a wish to her son that he should continue to occupy the house for twelve months ; and for this she had provided in her will ; paying the rent for that time, paying also Dorothy's wages. The greater portion of the furniture, he found, was left to him ; a little of it only going to Charlotte. Matters in the household were already reorganised. One of the maids was discharged ; the other remained with Dorothy ; and Thomas Kage was the sole master.

The future presented itself to his view in an indistinct form ; something like a picture with a veil over it. Whether he should rise rapidly in his profession, or get only bread-and-cheese at it for years and years, as but too many do, he knew not. It was a lottery at best. On very rare occasions, he would see, as in a glimpse, a vision of success : the old house renovated, ease prevailing, and a sweet form sitting beside the chair that had been his mother's. Its realisation was so very improbable, that he wondered whether he was becoming foolish for anticipating such a thing.

Nevertheless, it caused his heart to beat and his cheek to glow.

Meanwhile, a hitch occurred in the business that had taken him to Aberton, and he began to doubt whether there would be any necessity to go down again. In which case, he should have no plea for a second visit to Chilling.

CHAPTER V.

CALLED UP BY TELEGRAM.

THE village of Chilling was a small village, scarcely to be called one. It was retired, primitive, and very beautiful. A green there was, on which the stocks stood, unused now, and a bare common with a pound in its corner. The high-road wound past both green and common, with its handful of cottagers' dwellings on the other side of it. It went winding up by the entrance-gates of the Rock, leaving the gray church to the right, which stood midway between the Rock and the village. The church and parsonage were alike built of stone; but whereas the former remained rugged and time-worn, the latter had undergone renovation and improvement, so as to be, to all intents and purposes, a modern dwelling-place. Some few mansions were scattered about—gentlemen's seats—but none of them could boast of half the magnitude and beauty of Mr. Canterbury's—the Rock. Whence it derived its name

—suggestive of bleak cliffs and barren heights—none now living could tell. Certainly neither rocks nor bleak barrenness were near it; but, instead, all that can be imagined of sunny plains and rich foliage, and scenery that had scarce its fellow in the land.

Passing the quaint old lodge at the entrance-gates, the open park was gained, soft to the feet as grass-green moss, white in the season with its chestnut blossoms. The trees were very fine; the deer liked to rub their antlers against them; the young ladies, George Canterbury's daughters, used, when children, to sport under their shade. There, on its gentle eminence, close by as it were, for the park was small, rose the Rock, with its beautiful parterres of many-coloured flowers, its white terraces, and its fine broad entrance-steps.

A castle once stood there, on the very selfsame spot. Nearly all trace of it, save its legends, had long since passed away; but that it must have been of great repute and beauty in its time, the preserved records showed. George Canterbury, into whose hands they had come when he purchased the Rock, kept them as precious heirlooms.

The house faced the west, the terraces and the gay parterres of flowers alone intervening between it and the park. On the northern side the grounds were also comparatively open, and laid

out with exceeding taste ; on the southern side there was a very wilderness of shrubs and trees, extending quite to the boundary-wall, wonderfully refreshing to the sight on a day of burning heat, and a grateful resting-place of shelter from the afternoon sun.

In the midst of this wilderness stood an old well or fountain, sparkling with water once perhaps, but dry now. Shrubs, withered and stunted and dark with age, green and beautiful in their long-past prime, clustered round the brink in a tangled mass. It bore the name of the Lady's Well ; and the history attaching to it, whether fabled or real, was one of painful interest. The well has nothing whatever to do with modern times, or with this modern story, so its legend shall be omitted altogether ; for some readers might grumble at its insertion as a needless interruption. George Canterbury, who held possession of it amidst other records, refreshed his memory with a perusal of it from time to time. He felt a kind of pride in the accidental fact that his own son had borne the same name—Edgar—as the renowned Crusader-knight, Edgar de Chilling. Strong-minded Lydia Canterbury, the third daughter, who was of a hard, practical turn of mind, without an ounce of sentiment to leaven it, was wont to say her father's brain was so full

of the knight and the old family, that he had grown, she verily believed, to think he was descended from them. But Miss Lydia was rather free of tongue. You have heard Mrs. Garston, seeing her after her marriage and for the first time, pronounce her a 'tossed-off, bold-speaking thing;' and all because the young lady, in her random freedom, had called her a 'scarecrow.'

The Lady's Well had a fame of its own, apart from its romance and its legend. Superstition was rife there, as it is in many places to which curious stories attach. A lady's ghost was said to haunt it on windy nights; and very few of the Rock's female retainers would have cared to promenade on that side the house after dark, or perhaps in daylight either. Whether from this cause or not, certain it was that this part of the grounds was almost entirely unfrequented. The gardeners kept the clustering shrubs and trees in passable order, and there the culture ended. For one thing, nobody had cause to come on this southern side; the state-entrance lay in front, the household entrance at the back. On the northern side glass-doors opened to the beautiful lawn, and were very generally used by the family. A tale went abroad that, in certain conditions of the atmosphere, a reflection of a grand old castle might be seen in the sky, above the Rock, some-

thing after the fashion of a mirage. Some shepherds, tending their flocks on the far-away Welsh hills, professed to have seen this; and forthwith it was assumed to be a picture of the once-famous castle, called in its day the Castle of Chillingwater. Altogether, what with the present beauty of the place, what with the ancient histories of the castle whose site it covered, what with the still-existing well and its superstition, the Rock had become the show-place of the county; and it was quite a common thing for strangers sojourning in the neighbourhood to beg permission to go over it; which Mr. Canterbury was rather proud, than otherwise, to accord. Thus it may be perceived that the Rock was one of those fine and desirable mansions that the world talks of and writes about.

It was of more importance than its owner, George Canterbury; for Mr. Canterbury, in point of descent, was a very small personage indeed. He and his father—but chiefly his father—had made their immense fortune in mining speculations; and George Canterbury was but a young man when he withdrew altogether from business, and purchased the Rock. People, making a random guess, said he was worth a million of money. He was certainly worth a great deal, but nothing like so much as that.

Wealthy and luxurious though the Rock was, it had not been able to keep out our last enemy. Death had gone within George Canterbury's portals, and never said, With your leave, or By your leave. Mrs. Canterbury was the first to die. Miss Canterbury was then in her twentieth year, and she had at once assumed her post as the household's most efficient mistress. Several years subsequently, the only son was taken—Edgar. The young man, after he came to years of discretion, was neither steady nor sedate: certain odds and ends of light conduct had come out now and again, and penetrated to the ears of the family, causing concern to his sisters, bringing down reprobation from his father. But when his almost sudden death took place, it was to all of them a bitter and lasting grief. His faults were forgotten: they were, in fact, but those that too commonly attach to young men, and in one of less exalted station would never have been talked about. His virtues remained. Edgar Canterbury had the making of a fine man in him, and would have turned out well yet, had his life been spared. He lay ill little more than a week, in his rooms in the south wing; and then died. All their care, all their prayers, all the medical aid brought together from far and near, did not avail to save him. From two to three years had elapsed now; and they had

left off their mourning for him : but the south rooms remained untenanted, almost sacred ; and Edgar's things were in their accustomed places, just as though he inhabited them still.

Miss Canterbury was now regarded as the heiress to the Rock. That she would succeed to it just as surely as though it were entailed upon her, none doubted. It was well known that in the first weeks succeeding Edgar's death Mr. Norris, the family solicitor, had been summoned to the Rock by its master, to make a fresh will. It was legally executed ; and Mr. Canterbury informed his daughter that he had put her in Edgar's place ; and he delivered to her sundry injunctions, charges, wishes, in regard to the property, when he should be no more. None of the property was entailed. In all respects Miss Canterbury was well fitted to succeed her father ; gossips said she would make a more comprehensively-liberal mistress than he had been a master. It was certain that Miss Canterbury would never marry—at least, as certain as such contingencies ever can be. She had been on the point of marriage once to Harry Lynn-Garston, the eldest son of Mr. Lynn-Garston. Very painful circumstances parted them, and I only wish there was space to relate the history ; but you might say it took up time unnecessarily. They were parted, and Harry

Lynn-Garston's death followed rather soon upon it. Miss Canterbury said nothing to the world; whatever of grief and remorse she might feel—for the parting was her doing, not his—she buried it within her in silence. She had loved him deeply, enduringly, ardently, and never more so than when she gave him his dismissal. Love and haughty pride had had a struggle together in her spirit; the latter conquered, and he went back to India a rejected man. But when the news came of Captain Lynn-Garston's death in battle, Miss Canterbury knew that the sunshine of her existence had gone out for ever. She made no sign; for all people saw, she was indifferently tranquil; but later, when her father would have urged upon her the acceptance of another offer, she quietly told him she should live and die Olive Canterbury. And she was not one to break her resolution, in that matter or in any other.

After Mrs. Canterbury's death, there had been a stir in the county. Every mother for miles round who had daughters waiting to be married, ordered horses to her carriage, and set off to condole with George Canterbury. What though he had a flock of children—four daughters and a son—was not the Rock as a very mansion of refuge, if by good chance it might be attained to? Were not the riches, real and fabulous, as lumps of hang-

ing delight, making hearts hanker and mouths water? Even so. George Canterbury had to run the gauntlet his widowed state brought upon him, just as other widowers with desirable possessions are running it at this very hour. He came out unscathed, uncaught. It might have been that the very palpable nature of the overtures put him on his guard. Something or other rendered him mail-proof; and as the years and years went on, and nothing came of them, the hopes died away as bad, and Mr. Canterbury was left in peace.

So the Rock was to be the inheritance of Olive Canterbury; and it was surmised, by those likely to know, that the fortunes of the three younger daughters would be about a hundred thousand pounds each. They might well be called heiresses! Lydia had married Herbert Dunn, member for the county. He was a good deal older than herself. Mr. Canterbury had settled a thousand a-year upon her; but the larger portion of her fortune would not be hers until his death. They had no children, and Mr. Dunn had latterly been in ill-health.

The snow had dispersed; the country wore a warmer aspect, for the sun shone brightly. It was but early in the year, and those who were weatherwise said winter would be back yet. In the breakfast-room at the Rock, the white cloth

lighted up with its glittering silver and service of Worcester china, stood the two elder Miss Canterburys, — Olive and Jane. Olive was turned thirty now — a tall, stately, handsome woman, with a face of power, but good and genial. Her fine hair was of a purple blackness, her features were pale and clearly cut, her eyes were dark gray. They had some trouble in their depths this morning. Her gleaming silk swept the ground, as she stood with a folded paper in her hand. Olive Canterbury was never seen in merinos or cottons. Jane, the next sister, was fairer and quieter looking, betraying little of Olive's decision of mind and manner.

The Rock seemed to live so entirely within itself, possessing few interests without, and no business, that the arrival of a telegram was a startling event. One had been just delivered, addressed to Mr. Canterbury. Olive bent her brow a little, Jane turned pale. Neel the butler, who had brought it in, waited for orders.

‘It had better go up to papa at once, Neel. Is he getting up, do you know?’

‘Yes, ma'am. The shaving-water went in some time ago.’

‘Take this up, then.’

Neel went out with the formidable missive. Millicent, coming in at the time, saw it in his hand.

‘What is that, Olive?’ she asked, after wishing her sisters good-morning.

‘A telegraphic despatch.’

‘A telegraphic despatch!’ repeated Millicent in a frightened tone. ‘O Olive! What can it be? Who is it from?’

‘Millicent, child, don’t put yourself out; that can do no good.’

‘What are you fearing, Olive?’

‘That something is amiss with Lydia or her husband. I know of no one else likely to be telegraphing.’

‘If Lydia—Hark!’

Mr. Canterbury’s dressing-room bell was ringing loudly. Neel, coming down from delivering the despatch to his master, hastened back again.

‘Breakfast instantly!’ was the order. ‘Tell Miss Canterbury.’

The telegram was from Mrs. Dunn. Her husband was alarmingly worse, it was feared dying, and Mr. Canterbury was prayed to hasten to London.

Mr. Canterbury was one of those who can but lose their heads on such an occasion. Olive would have been as tranquil as the day. Everything necessary to be done could have been done for him. His servants would have put up his clothes; he had but to say, ‘I am going to London,’ and

take his breakfast in peace, and step into his carriage to be conveyed leisurely to the station at Aberton. Not so. Mr. Canterbury was in as much commotion as though his own life depended on his departure, or as if the business of the world had been suddenly thrown upon his shoulders. He could not take his breakfast sitting; every moment he got up from it—now looking from the window, now dodging to the fire, now calling out, ‘I shall want this put into my portmanteau,’ or ‘I shall not want that.’ To be summoned out in this haste had never occurred to him before in his tranquil life, so there might be an excuse for him.

‘Dear papa, it will be all right,’ spoke Olive; ‘there is not the slightest necessity for this. The first train you can go by is the ten o’clock.’

‘Dear me! I’m sure I shall not get there. I know I shall forget everything I ought to take. Had there been time, I should have liked to ask whether I could take up any message for the parsonage. Their relations, the London Annesleys, live close by Lydia.’

‘I will go to the parsonage and inquire, papa,’ said Millicent, starting up. ‘I’ll bring you back word.’

‘You have not finished breakfast.’

‘Indeed I have. While you’ve been fidgeting,

papa, I've been eating. There's plenty and plenty of time.'

In two minutes Millicent was out of the house, her mantle on, and tying her bonnet as she ran through the park, and gained the road. The church was not far, a quarter of a mile or so; the schools were on that side it, the parsonage was on this. It was a low, broad house, sheltered by trees, with a portico-entrance, and a level lawn, surrounded by sweet-scented flowers. Woodbine, wild-roses, clematis, jasmine, clustered round the porch in summer, and spread to the lower windows on either side.

The Reverend Philip Annesley, Rector of Chilling for the past five-and-thirty years, was old now and fading fast. He had christened all George Canterbury's children, and they looked up to him as a second father. It was a break-down altogether, rather than any specific malady. Sarah Annesley, his considerate, dutiful, and most loving daughter, bitterly regretted having left him for so many weeks the previous autumn, to accompany Mrs. Kage to the sea-side. There lay on her mind a lively resentment against that lady for having taken her, which was perhaps a little unjust.

Entering on her hasty errand, Millicent found Miss Annesley in trouble. Her father was pal-

pably weaker that morning than he had been at all—quite unable to get up. For the first time, the doctor had not ventured to speak of hope. Millicent, struck into herself at the news, did not at once mention the cause of her early visit.

‘I thought until to-day he might rally and get about again,’ said Sarah, as they stood side by side on the hearthrug, the firelight betraying the tears resting in her eyes, and causing them to glitter like glass; ‘but I do fear now there is not much hope of it. And O, how I blame myself!’

‘For what?’ asked Millicent in surprise. If ever there had been a daughter anxious to fulfil unselfishly every duty of life, it had surely been Sarah Annesley.

‘For having left him alone in the autumn. You know I spoke of this to you once before, Millicent. The regret grows upon me; it lies with a heavy weight to-day. Six weeks! six weeks, Millicent!—and he seventy-five. I shall never forgive myself for my thoughtlessness. It seems to me at odd moments as if I could not be forgiven by Heaven.’

‘But he was so well at that time.’

‘I know it. So well, that I was lulled into a false security. I did think I ought not to leave him; and when Mrs. Kage first proposed to me to accompany her, I said decisively that I could

not quit my father. What did she do? She came here one afternoon when I had gone out with Caroline, and talked papa into the belief that I required a change and sea-air. I think she *alarmed* him about me, saying I looked pale and fagged; I do, indeed, Millicent. Papa made all the arrangements at once, without waiting to consult me, and I was weak enough and wicked enough, after a faint opposition, to fall in with them.'

'And so would any one else, Sarah.'

'When I came home, at the end of the six weeks, and saw the alteration in papa, my heart sunk within me. Of course, the chief fault was mine; but I do feel afraid that I have hated Mrs. Kage ever since.'

'O Sarah! It was so kind of her to take charge of us.'

'I don't think it was done in kindness,' avowed Sarah, speaking freely in her honest indignation. 'I think she only proposed for us to go that *she* might be able to do so. The sum she named to papa as my share of the expenses was not very large; but she brought back an account which was, and the payment of it crippled him. Millicent, she had a larger one from Mr. Canterbury; and I know the two must have paid the whole cost of the expedition, so that she and Caroline went free.'

A flush shone in Millicent's face at the possibility of the truth. She—simple, honest, guileless—could not quite believe it. Sarah had said somewhat of this before, but not so fully.

‘The regret lies upon me with painful bitterness,’ resumed Miss Annesley. ‘I cannot sleep; and if I do get to sleep, I wake up again with a start. Never before did I know what remorse was.’

‘Don't you think that your sorrow for Mr. Annesley is causing you to take an exaggerated view of this?’ Millicent ventured to ask.

‘No. But for my leaving him all that while, I do not think his health would have failed so soon,’ Sarah continued in a low tone of emotion, as she pressed her face down on the cold white-marble mantelpiece to hide its anguish. ‘He had more work to do in the parish, mine and his own; he had no one to help him in the visiting; he took all the duty on the three Sundays when Mr. Lowe was ill; and he finished up by catching a terrible cold, which he could not stay indoors to nurse. Altogether, it told upon him, Millicent, and he broke down earlier than he would have done.’

‘I cannot stay, Sarah,’ Millicent said, as she proceeded to tell of Mr. Canterbury's summons to London, and inquire if he could do anything.

‘Thank you, no. Should he see Mrs. Annes-

ley, he can explain to her how ill papa is. We have never had much acquaintance with the London Annesleys, Millicent. I fancy she is a very cold woman. I hope your papa will find Mr. Dunn better. I wonder Lydia did not send for Miss Canterbury or Jane.'

'You must have forgotten Lydia to suppose she could do anything of the sort,' answered Millicent, with a smile. 'Lydia stands upon her own independence. She would be far likelier to warn Miss Canterbury and Jane that she did not want them, than to accept of their companionship if offered. She is so strong-minded, you know. Good-bye, Sarah. Papa will be in a fever.'

The first thing she saw on quitting the rectory-gate was the carriage of Mr. Canterbury. It drew up; the footman got down to open the door, and Millicent delivered the slight message to her impatient father.

'O, very well. Good-bye, Leta dear. I know I shall be late at the station.'

The handsome equipage bowled on, and Millicent glanced after it with a smile. He would be, as she had expressed it, in a fever until he got to the station, and then he would have twenty minutes to spare.

'What is the carriage abroad so early for?'

A hand was laid on her shoulder as the ques-

tion was put, and Millicent turned to see the lovely face of Caroline Kage. If it was unusual to see Mr. Canterbury's carriage abroad at that early hour, it was at least as unusual to see *her*. And Millicent, as a great many more of us do, asked the reason of it, instead of answering the question.

'Mamma came down in the crossiest mood possible. She found fault with me and with everybody else, so I thought I would go and have a whole morning at the schools. Work now and then makes a change. Goodness knows it is monotonous enough here.'

'Monotonous!'

'I feel it so. That time at the seaside last autumn did me harm, I suppose, insomuch as that I have found Chilling intolerably weary since. And the carriage, Leta?'

Leta told her what had happened, and where Mr. Canterbury had gone. To London: summoned by the startling despatch.

'Did you charge him to give your love?'

'No; I forgot it. Things have all been at sixes and sevens this morning. Lydia would not have appreciated it if I had; she never cares for such messages, and never sends them.'

'I was not speaking of Lydia, but of Thomas Kage.'

‘ Caroline !’

‘ Ah, well ! You would have liked to send it him, you know ; and he would have liked to receive it. He has only you, now his mother’s gone. Don’t get scarlet, Leta !’

Leta Canterbury ran away. However the name of Thomas Kage might cause her heart to glow, it was not pleasant to be thus spoken to. Caroline—false Caroline !—went on to the post-office before turning in at the schools, and dropped a letter into the box, addressed to Thomas Kage.

For they had fallen into the habit of corresponding with each other. But only as friends—or cousins.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE MOONLIT SKY.

IT was a bright Easter. And things, since that hurried visit of Mr. Canterbury's to London, had had time to get round. Mr. Dunn had died; but Mr. Annesley was better, and at his duty again. It is true the old pastor shook his head, and said it was but like the spark of a dying candle, life flickering up momentarily before going out.

Easter Monday was a great day at Chilling. Prayers at the church in the morning, the poor children's treat in the school-house in the afternoon, a dinner at the Rock in the evening. They were on their way to the school-house now.

The parsonage-gate was swung back, and the good old Rector, with his benevolent face and his white hair, came forth, leaning on his daughter's arm. On the small patch of greensward beside the schools he encountered a group of friends who had stayed to talk—the Miss Canterburys, the Honourable and Reverend Austin Rufort, Mrs. Kage and her daughter. Mr. Rufort, a tall and

fine man, some years past thirty, displaced Miss Annesley from her post with a smile, and gave his strong arm of support to the Rector—for whom he had latterly often come over to do duty. All these were to dine at the Rock in the evening.

‘Papa, you are only to stay in the school half an hour, you know,’ said Sarah. ‘You will like to say grace, but Mr. Rufort must do all the talking.’

‘Every word of it,’ put in Mr. Rufort.

‘I wonder, my dear sir, that you should venture to the school at all,’ languidly observed Mrs. Kage. ‘Charity children are tiresome animals at the best.’

Mrs. Kage held her glass to her eye as she spoke, surveying fresh comers. She wore a lavender-silk gown and white bonnet, and would have called it mourning with a steady face. She had put on ‘complimentary mourning’ for Lady Kage, as the latter had a title. It sounded well to say to the world ‘I am in mourning for the late Lady Kage,’ however she might have despised that lady during life. The Miss Canterburys were in mourning for Mr. Dunn—black silk and crape.

‘Ah, Fry!’ cried the Rector, holding out his hand to an elderly man who was leaning on a stick. ‘How are you, Fry?’

‘I thought I’d crawl out, sir, this fine day and

just have a look at 'em for the last time,' said the man addressed, who was the parish clerk, though unable to perform his duty now, and had been the boys' schoolmaster. 'Your servant, gentlefolks. —I shall be lying low enough before another Easter, sir.'

'And somebody else by your side, John, unless I am mistaken,' replied Mr. Annesley with significance.

So much occupied were they with each other, these people, as not to observe some one turn off the high-road and come towards them: a gentleman in black, with a deep band on his hat. Mrs. Kage, twirling her eyeglass on various objects within range, twirled it at length on him; and certainly thought, when she had got him well to view, that the glass must be playing her false. For it looked like Thomas Kage.

'How very extraordinary!' exclaimed Mrs. Kage. 'What can bring *him* here?'

They wheeled round at the words. He was close up then, and his appearance excited no little commotion, outwardly and inwardly. Those who knew him—Mr. Annesley and his daughter—put out their hands to welcome him, Mrs. Kage extended the tip of her forefinger; those who did not, stared; and the two young ladies, Millicent and Caroline, were conscious that burning blushes

arose in their faces and a soft tumult in their hearts.

Millicent very shyly introduced him to her sisters—‘Mr. Kage.’ And Olive, who did not remember so much about ‘Mr. Kage’ as she did, was in some doubt; but she bowed courteously in her grand way, and took an opportunity of inquiring of her sister.

‘What Mr. Kage is it, Leta? Who is he?’

‘Why, Olive, don’t you know? The Mr. Kage we saw at Little Bay. He came down here last January, and had not time to call; papa saw him at the rectory; and his mother, Lady Kage, died as soon as he got back to London.’

Rather a roundabout explanation, Olive thought, and shyly delivered; but Leta was naturally shy, and not very fluent of speech. Olive, enlightened as to the identity, turned to the stranger to make better acquaintance with him; she had heard through the Garstons of this mother and son—heard nothing but good; and she liked his face besides. Olive Canterbury could read countenances as a book, and said none had ever deceived her. Leta blushed again violently, for she saw her father come up to Mr. Kage with a stretched-out hand. Besides that first meeting at the parsonage, they had since made better acquaintance with each other in London.

Mr. Kage's appearance was soon explained. The business on which he previously came to Aberton had again brought him down, whence he had walked over to Chilling.

'Being holiday in London, I took the opportunity of running down,' he said, 'not remembering that it would be a greater holiday in the country, and all the Aberton business people off for the day. I must remain there now until to-morrow.'

'And dine with me, I hope, this evening at the Rock,' said Mr. Canterbury. 'We shall be a pleasant party; all these friends are to meet there.'

'Thank you. But I have no dinner-coat with me.'

They laughed at that. Miss Canterbury pointedly said that she would be just as happy to see him in his frock-coat as in any other; and Mr. Rufort declared he meant to appear in a long coat, and not a short one. And so it was settled.

Millicent, stealing glances at him from where she stood apart, thought he was looking ill—wan, thin, pale. As indeed he had looked ever since his mother's death, for his grief for her was indulged to an extent that told upon him.

But the school-room was waiting, and they turned to it. Caroline Kage, her lovely face ra-

diant, lingered behind with Millicent, deceitfully feeding—as it was her wont to do—the unsuspecting girl's heart with whispers of the love of Thomas Kage.

‘He must have dreamt of the fête to-day, Leta, and that he would meet you at it.’

‘He is meeting the rest as well.’

‘What of that?’

‘Don't you think he looks ill?’

Caroline had noticed nothing of it. She was not a quick observer.

‘Every one looks pale in deep mourning. He is black, you see, even to his shirt-studs.’

‘Yes. But his face has a wan, worn look.’

‘That's through pining after you.’

‘Caroline,’ said Leta very gravely, and with a warm flush, ‘I must once more beg of you not to continue this. Why will you persist in doing it? It is the height of folly, besides being unpleasant to me, to couple my name with that of Mr. Kage. We have nothing at all to do with each other, as you must know. He does not care for me more than he does for any one else.’

‘Which is as much as to say that you do care for him.’

‘No, it is not. Do pray drop it for the future. Fancy the dilemma I should be in if Olive or any of them heard you.’

Caroline laughed provokingly.

'Please, Caroline; you would not like it yourself. Only think of his having met papa in London! Papa never mentioned it.'

'I wonder how he is left?' cried Caroline abruptly.

'Left!'

'As to money. Mamma says Lady Kage was a great screw, so she may have saved a fortune.'

'I once heard your mamma say Lady Kage was very poor. Perhaps she meant poor for a titled woman.'

'There he is, waiting for—for you, Leta.'

Mr. Kage had halted outside the school-house, and was looking back. The soft flush on Caroline's face deepened; and it was she who walked in with him side-by-side,—in spite of her words,—leaving Leta anywhere.

School-treats were not in Mrs. Kage's line. She came out to them because others did, and that it was a kind of gala-time, allowing for the display of her best dress and sentimental manners. This one proved not more palatable than others had been; and when the Rector left, leaning on the arm of Thomas Kage,—of whom he was asking questions about his old friend Mrs. Garston,—Mrs. Kage took the opportunity of leaving also. There was nothing to wait for: Mr. Canterbury

had stayed but a short while, Lord Rufort had not come; they were the two great resources of Mrs. Kage, with whom she liked to consort—the one held in estimation through his riches, the other through his rank. ‘When I am with Lord Rufort, I feel at home; it seems like old days come back again,’ Mrs. Kage was rather fond of saying to her friends.

Leaving the clergyman indoors, Mrs. Kage turned towards her home, taking, without ceremony, the arm of Thomas, that he might attend her to it.

‘You are not in a hurry to get back for five minutes?’ observed Mrs. Kage.

In point of fact, that estimable lady had an end to serve. In spite of her daughter’s ruse to deceive her, persisted in still, Mrs. Kage could not help indulging a faint suspicion that the love, if there existed any, was not between Mr. Kage and Leta Canterbury, but between Mr. Kage and Caroline herself. This would be terribly awkward—not to be thought of at all—if Thomas had nothing but his profession; if, however, he had inherited money from his mother, why perhaps his having the misfortune to be the son of that despised woman might in time be overcome. Mrs. Kage had heard of instances where barristers (on whom she scornfully looked down as a class) had

risen to the Woolsack. A rumour had reached Chilling that Lady Kage had died rich. Mrs. Kage was surprised, but thought it might be. This must be ascertained.

Crossing the road from the rectory, a privet-path—as it was called, from there being a privet-hedge on either side it—led to Mrs. Kage's house. It was not far, and she talked of ordinary things as they went along. Causing him to enter the sitting-room, she closed the door.

‘And now that we have a moment to ourselves, Thomas dear, you must allow me to ask how things are left?’ she began, in an affectionate, confidential tone, such as she had never used to him in her life. ‘Your dear mother's death came upon me, I assure you, with an overwhelming shock.’

‘As it did on all of us,’ he quietly answered, standing by the window, while she took her seat on the opposite sofa.

‘Ay, it was very sad. I would have made Caroline read the burial service to me the day of the interment, but that it might have given her gloomy ideas, poor child.’

The calling up of such was by no means agreeable to Mrs. Kage herself, even now; and she emptied three-fourths of a phial of Cologne-water on her handkerchief.

‘Sit down, Thomas; I cannot talk on these

melancholy subjects unless people are close to me. Are you left well off, my dear ?'

'A great deal better than I expected to be. My mother was full of love for me to the end.'

'That's well,' said Mrs. Kage, opening her fan complaisantly. 'Had Lady Kage saved much money ?'

'Yes, I consider that she had.'

His ideas, in so answering, were running on his mother's small income, and what she had to make it do for. Mrs. Kage's notions were altogether different, very high in the air indeed.

'And she has left it all to you, dearest Thomas ?'

'She has left it all to my sister, Mrs. Lowther. Not any of it to me.'

It was very rare that Mrs. Kage allowed so vulgar an emotion as surprise to be seen on her face, but she could not help it now. And, indeed, this answer seemed at variance with what he had just said. Her manner froze a little.

'We are connections, you know, Thomas ; I can scarcely say relatives. Perhaps you will not mind telling me the particulars of how your mother's affairs were left. It is only natural that I should have thought sometimes about it.'

'I will tell you everything with the greatest

pleasure,' he replied, his good, frank countenance bent a little forward, his honest eyes fixed on hers, as he sat resting his arm on the table. 'There is not much to tell—'

'Your mother made a will, I presume?' interrupted Mrs. Kage sharply.

'She made a will, and left me sole executor. The money she had been able to save turned out, after all claims were paid, to be over eight hundred pounds. I gave Charlotte my cheque for it last week.'

Mrs. Kage's mouth dropped. To one whose thoughts are running upon twice as many thousands, eight hundred pounds seems very mean and poor.

'O!' said Mrs. Kage. 'Then what did you mean by saying she left you better off than you expected?'

'When the will was opened, I found she had left me the greater portion of the furniture. A few of the things only go to Charlotte, and half the silver, which was but a very small stock altogether. A sum was set apart for the next year's rent, and I am enjoined to remain in the house for that period, should nothing of importance call me out of it.'

Mrs. Kage was fanning herself rather violently. 'A very unjust will, I must say!' she remarked.

‘Charlotte Lowther was no blood-relation to your mother.’

‘She was my father’s child; and my mother loved her as her own. Besides, Charlotte wants help far more than I do. I think she will be the justest that my dear mother could have made.’

‘Oblige me by setting light to a pastile, Thomas; there’s one close to you. Did Lady Kage leave anything to Dorothy?’

‘She left her to me,’ he answered, with a slight smile, as he looked for the pastile. ‘Dorothy had some clothes and twenty pounds, and her next year’s wages paid in advance.’

‘And you have only a few paltry bits of old furniture! Dear me! One does hear of queer things.’

‘It is so much more than I looked for. I only thought to have her blessing. Do you know, when I read the will, and found the home was secured to me for a year, and the rent paid and Dorothy’s wages, I felt like a rich man. If I could only see my mother for one minute to pour out my gratitude!’

Mrs. Kage did not think it worth while to contend further; she looked upon him as only three degrees removed from a fool. She felt half inclined to look on herself as another, for having for a moment entertained the thought that Lady

Kage could have died worth anything to speak of. Thomas was at liberty to quit her now; and she composed herself, after a few drops of red lavender, which the maid came in to administer, to take a refreshing nap.

It lasted so long that she found, on awaking, she had barely time to dress for the dinner at the Rock. Caroline was late, too, and came forth from her room at the last moment, in a white dress and black sash, with jet necklace and bracelets. Mrs. Kage stared at the attire, so different from what had been fixed upon.

‘And your pink silk? And your pearls?’

‘O mamma, I *could* not put them on!’ was Caroline’s answer, with quite a burst of feeling. ‘How could I go out flaunting in colours, when Thomas Kage, in his deep black, was to dine at my side?’

‘You were not in mourning to-day. He saw you then.’

‘I know it all; and I never felt so ashamed of myself before. He cared so much for his mother; and she has not been dead quite two months!’

‘And if she has not?’

‘He must think us so heartless.’

‘It is not of any consequence what he thinks. He—Is that the carriage? Dear me! I wanted to have told you something.’

The fine large close carriage with its attendant servants, belonging to the Rock, had bowled up, Mr. and Miss Annesley inside. It had been arranged that it should call for Mrs. Kage and Caroline, and convey them home in the evening.

Thomas Kage, he could not tell why, unless it was through hearing so much of the vast revenues of the master of the Rock, had in his own mind associated the place with just the slightest soupçon of ostentation, that kind of display we are apt to fancy pertains to the *nouveau riche*. His late father's name had secured for Mr. Kage the entrance to good society, and his tastes, a little fastidious, were all on the side of simplicity.

He was agreeably surprised. When he saw the good order and refined breeding that prevailed at the Rock; its perfectly-appointed rooms and service; its intellectual books and quiet ways; the pure home-life that shone out unmistakably; the simple manners of the girls; and the *lack* of ostentation in any shape, his conscience smote him. Luxury there was certainly at the Rock; it could not be otherwise with such an income as George Canterbury's; but it was a luxury felt, rather than seen, one that might belong to a taste pure as his own.

Lord Rufort, a tall man, stiff as a poker, with iron-gray hair and a head that bent to nobody,

took in Miss Canterbury; Mr. Canterbury took Mrs. Kage. Thomas Kage neither saw nor knew how the rest of the party were paired: he had Caroline, and that was all he cared for. Leta got Austin Rufort—and thought herself very ill-used. Perhaps Mr. Rufort considered *he* was; for he looked upon Leta as a bread-and-butter school-girl, and would a vast deal rather have been with her sister Jane. But Jane was allotted to Mr. Carlton of Chilling Hall. Miss Canterbury always exercised her privilege of ordering these social arrangements, and there might be no appealing against her authority.

Sixteen were at table. Olive, magnificent in her black-net dress with the white rose in her hair, and a small black circlet inlaid with silver on her beautiful neck, was at its head; a noble, gracious mistress. Mr. Canterbury, good-looking still, quite young, so to say, erect, slender, sat at its foot—Mrs. Kage beside him, her neck terribly thin and wiry through its lace covering. The servants were ample and attentive; the appointments of the table rich and beautiful. Better than all, the guests amalgamated, and sociality reigned. It was the pleasantest dinner-party Thomas Kage had ever been present at, and for its brief existence he was cheated into forgetting his grief and the mother who had been so much to him. Time

is a great consoler, and the sincerest mourner of us all insensibly yields to it. While we are saying, 'I shall never look up again from the blow that has fallen on me,' Heaven itself is gently lifting the weight from the heavy eyes.

There was music after dinner. So genial was the night that the large window of one of the drawing-rooms was flung open, and some of them stood at it and looked out on the fair scene beyond, steeped in moonlight. But Mr. Canterbury came up to preach about the night-air, and had it closed. Mr. Annesley and his daughter went home immediately after dinner. Mrs. Kage, who was to have taken advantage of the carriage to leave when they did, said she was not ready to go, and remained.

'Olive,' said Mr. Canterbury, sitting down for a single minute by his daughter, 'what an exceedingly nice fellow he is!'

'Who, papa?' Miss Canterbury naturally asked.

'Young Kage. I liked him the first time I saw him, that few minutes at the parsonage last January; I liked him more in London; I like him most now. An uncommonly clever man, I know; sensible and unaffected.'

Olive nodded; and smiled to find her father right for once. In a general way George Canter-

bury could no more read character than a block of wood could. She, keen and sure in discernment, had also conceived a liking for Thomas Kage. And the evening wore on.

Mr. Carlton offered a seat in his carriage to Mrs. Kage; Caroline, in her wilful way, said she should walk home; the night was too lovely not to be enjoyed; her cousin, Thomas Kage, could take care of her.

Very lovely, indeed, was it when they went out, Caroline with a shawl on her shoulders and nothing on her head. Mr. Canterbury was afraid she would catch face-ache, at which Caroline burst out laughing: it was only old people who had that, she saucily answered. Two or three of the other guests walked also, and they all set out together, choosing the way across the fields. Jane and Leta Canterbury went with them as far as the side-gate, and then ran home gleefully. O, the happy, careless days of youth! when the body fears no ailments, the mind knows naught of trouble.

Mrs. Kage, deposited at home from Mr. Carlton's carriage, heard the noise they made in coming over the field, and she opened the shutter to look out. Her eyes were growing dim of sight, which she would not have acknowledged for the world; but it is wonderful how keen dim eyes can

still be when swayed by fear or self-interest. She managed to discern—and a frown rose to her face as she did so—that though the rest were laughing and talking loudly, Caroline and Mr. Kage walked apart, far behind, concerning themselves only with one another.

It was so. When they came out, Caroline went close to him, and he gave her his arm. It was she who caused their steps to linger; it was her voice that first took the low, tremulous tone that of itself unconsciously betrayed love. Thomas Kage's whole heart was bursting with it; a sweet tumult, in the delight of her presence, of holding her on his arm, was all aglow within him. But he was of a strictly honourable nature, and made no sign; walking along, save for a commonplace word now and again, in telling silence.

Mrs. Kage, getting him by her that evening in Miss Canterbury's drawing-room, had whispered with affectionate candour a word or two of her great views for her daughter. Caroline was to make a match in accordance with the rank of her grandfather, Lord Gunse. Mrs. Kage was not sure, she added, that the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Rufort had not cast a covetous eye on Caroline; but she had taken care to give him a hint that her daughter must marry wealth as well as rank. Crafty Mrs. Kage knew perfectly well that the

Honourable and Reverend Mr. Rufort thought no more of her daughter than he did of her ; but she deemed it convenient to invent the fable for the benefit of Thomas Kage.

To what end ? She need not have feared that Thomas Kage would speak of love to her daughter, or to any other young lady, until his position enabled him to speak to some purpose. So far as present prospects went, that desirable state of affairs would be achieved by the time Caroline might expect to be a grandmother. He would have given the whole world for his circumstances to be different ; but they were not, and he could not make them so. Not under any seductive surroundings was Thomas Kage one to lose his head incautiously : his prudence was in his own hands if his love was not, and Caroline's true interests were as dear to him as she was. She was as safe from avowals with him as with her mother.

But he had not the least objection to linger as long as might be on this night walk—which would remain on his memory as one of the few sweet moments of existence until time for him should be no more. The moon, looking like pale gold in the blue sky, shone, white and lovely, on the blades of early grass on either side the field-path, on the budding hedges, on the stile they would have to cross ; the air was balmy, the night

altogether one of bright, soft loveliness. That Caroline loved him, Mr. Kage no longer doubted; her manner showed it very plainly. He had fondly fancied it before; he knew it now; and it may be that his accents took a tenderer tone in spite of himself as he spoke to her—a tone rarely mistaken by its recipient. A dazzling vision of future promise seemed to rise in the sky, turning all things to gold. Don't blame him for it—remember the moments when it rose for you.

‘Is it true that we shall not see you after to-night?’ she asked, breaking a long interval of silence.

‘Quite true. I must get my business in Aberton over betimes to-morrow, and go back by the eleven-o'clock train.’

‘I wonder you do not manage to stay a little longer,’ she went on, hoping he would not hear the beating of her heart. ‘Perhaps you do not care to.’

‘I should care for it very much, Caroline; but it is one of the things that cannot be. Life has its crosses as well as its hopes and pleasures.’

‘Have you crosses?’

‘Yes.’

‘What are they?’

‘Some of them would not particularly interest you. Others, that might, I cannot mention now.’

‘Why not?’

‘The time has not come. Should it ever do so, you shall hear them.’

It is possible that she understood him; it is even possible that he intended she should. There was no more said. Caroline remembered afterwards, with a burning blush, that she had unconsciously pressed his arm a shade closer by way of answer; and they walked the rest of the way in that delicious, conscious silence which is more eloquent than any speech.

‘I must run back; I have left my umbrella at the Rock,’ he exclaimed as they reached Mrs. Kage’s gate between the laurels, where the rest of the party had halted. ‘In five minutes I shall be back, Caroline, and will come in to wish your mother good-bye.’

Caroline went in, and said as much to Mrs. Kage. That lady received the message ungraciously. Closing the half-shutter she had held open to reconnoitre, she sat down by the fire in the midst of her scents and pastiles.

‘He need not trouble himself to wish me good-bye; it does not matter. What a blow he has got!’

‘Who has?’ cried Caroline.

‘Tom Kage. I said he looked worn and ill.’

‘But what is it?’

Caroline's breath was hushed a little as she spoke. And Mrs. Kage, flirting out some pungent essence from a patent-stoppered bottle, flirted it by accident into Caroline's face.

'His mother has not left him a shilling; she has left it all to Charlotte—what's her name?—I never can remember it. Not that it was much to leave—a few paltry hundreds. He says he is glad Charlotte should have it instead of him, of which I believe just as much as I like. Of course the poor creature *wants* it, with her crowd of children and her scrambling life. It serves her right. Sir Charles Kage's daughter (who was not connected, you know, with the low woman he afterwards married) should have respected herself better than to marry a man beneath her—one of those working engineers.'

Caroline Kage, sitting with her cheek in her hand and her elbow on the arm of the chair, felt as if her heart had grown cold suddenly.

'Lady Kage was not a low woman, mamma.'

'Not a low woman!' softly responded Mrs. Kage, taking up her smelling-salts. 'My dear Caroline, do you think you know better than I? In the old days, when Maria Carr came into the room in attendance on the little Charlotte, she did not presume to sit in the presence of my family—not to sit, my dear, unless bade to do

so. Ah, it was a fatal thing, Sir Charles's engaging the girl! And he did it in the teeth of the most munificent offer made him by my people.'

Caroline questioned with her eyes.

'My mother went to him and offered to take the child into our house and bring her up, without recompense of course, except what Sir Charles might choose voluntarily to give. She urged it on him; and, by the way, Charlotte showed her self-willed temper then; for when my sister Matilda caught her to her arms and said, would she go home with her to be loved and have sugar-plums, the ill-conditioned little wretch set up a loud scream. My mother told Sir Charles it was her black frock that made her cry, and Sir Charles said, "Most likely." He did not accept the offer, and what were the deplorable consequences? Maria Carr got into the house, and never went out of it.'

Overpowered by the reminiscence, Mrs. Kage saturated her handkerchief with eau de cologne and held it to her nose, glancing furtively over the cambric at her daughter.

'Has Thomas Kage had nothing left to him?' asked Caroline, thinking only of the one thing.

'Nothing. She paid the rent of the place they are in for a year, that he might have, at least for that time, a roof over his head; and Dorothy's wages for as long, that she might see to him.

A few of the old chairs and tables are his ; nothing more. My dear, I see how it will be, and *he* sees it—that in twenty years to come he will be no better off than he is now, a poor briefless barrister, toiling to get bread-and-cheese and beer, and hardly doing it. He has no interest ; he told me so to-day. How can he be likely to get on ?’

Caroline put her hand for a moment upon her chest, as if she had a pain there.

‘Is this true, mamma ?’

‘It is as true as Heaven’s gospel,’ responded Mrs. Kage ; and for once in her life, forgetting her languid affectation, she spoke with energy, her face lighted up with interest. Caroline saw that it *was* true ; and with that miserable moment the sunshine of her young life went out.

Thomas Kage came back laughing, his breath spent, his umbrella in his hand. The early day had been cloudy ; the night might have turned out rainy, and he had to walk to Aberton. Mr. Canterbury had offered a carriage, but it was not accepted. He had come away from the Rock with a pressing invitation from its master to go and stay at it during the autumn vacation. This he told them now.

‘Ah, indeed,’ drawled Mrs. Kage, quite oppressed with languor ; ‘I’d not advise you to accept it : there’d be no enjoyment. Olive Can-

terbury is dictatorial, and Jane is buried in church and school business up to her elbows ; and Leta's a simpleton. I'll say adieu to you, Thomas Kage. It is late, and I am fatigued. This has been quite a day of dissipation.' She held out the tips of two fingers. Nothing more.

Caroline, asking nobody's leave, went out with him round the laurels to the outer gate. He turned and took her hand when he passed through it.

' Good-bye, Caroline,' he said in a low tone ;
' God bless you !'

Her heart was sore with its pain ; she struggled with it for an instant and burst into tears.

He was intensely surprised. Perhaps, had he said a word then of the love and hope that so yearned for utterance, their lives might have been widely different, and the course of events so changed, that the great trouble lying in the womb of the future, and which was destined to overshadow one of them fatally, the other in a degree, had never been led up to.

' Good-bye, Thomas—good-bye.'

The words, spoken with a wail of anguish, came forth as abruptly as the tears had done. She wrenched her hand from his, after pressing his fingers almost to pain, shot away rapidly indoors, and he heard the bolt slipped.

‘Good-night, mamma,’ Caroline called out as she passed the sitting-room; ‘I’m going to bed.’

Forth from the open chamber window she leaned in her dinner-dress, the moonlight playing on her white shoulders, on the tears streaming down her cheeks.

Caroline had the sense to look matters in the face and judge them truly. She knew that she never could be a poor man’s wife, unless she would become a wretched, heartless woman, like her mother—worried in private, made up of small affectations in public, discontented and false always. She loved Thomas Kage with that passionate love that can touch the heart but once; but she knew that she must give him up, and her heart half broke with its pain. She watched him across the open fields towards Aberton, only the faintest speck in the distance now; he was all but out of sight; and her young face grew wild with anguish, and her covetous eyes were strained through their blinding tears; and in an excess of despair she flung her hands out imploringly.

‘Farewell, Thomas, my best-beloved!—farewell for ever!’

She got to sleep towards morning, and dreamt of falling into ten thousand a-year, and of going to be happy with Thomas Kage; and for some

few moments after waking, the dream held the semblance of a blessed reality. A faint cry—than which no moan contained ever deeper anguish—supervened. The truth had dawned on Caroline Kage.

CHAPTER VII.

ENTERING ON A NEW HOME.

SUMMER weather had come in, and the heat and the dust of a windy day in early June filled the London streets. The pavements were scorched below, the gusts reigned above ; it was a relief to Thomas Kage when he turned into the shelter of one of the railway-stations, to meet a train that came from the direction of Wales.

Five minutes, and it steamed in. It had left Aberton in the morning, and the journey had been uneventful. Mr. Kage regarded each first-class carriage attentively as it slowly passed, and saw a young lady in deep mourning looking from the window of one. A cordial smile of greeting lighted up his eyes as he raised his hat to her in recognition.

Death had been finding its way to Chilling. The good old Rector, Philip Annesley, had not been mistaking in saying that his apparently renewed lease of life was a deceptive one, like unto

a candle that shoots up a bright spark before going out. Almost close upon the festivities of that Easter Monday, he had failed again, and Death came in to claim its own.

The value of the living was but moderate—barely three hundred a-year—and Mr. Annesley for some ten years past had to keep a curate, and pay him out of it, besides other expenses. Until recently a sick sister had been partly dependent on him; he was in the habit of transmitting her ten pounds every quarter. The renovations to the parsonage-house—which he had to make—had cost a great deal: he was very charitable; and altogether his income had run away. Nevertheless, plenty of people were found to say he ought to have saved more, when it was heard how very slender a provision was left for his daughter.

Not a provision at all, as the world would count it. When all resources were gathered together, including the sum paid for the furniture by the new Rector, it was found that she would have about thirty pounds a-year. Not a fraction more: if anything, rather less. She had been invited to take up her abode temporarily with some relatives in London, until—to use the expression of the lady inviting her—she could turn herself round; which, of course, meant, secure some suitable employment.

The new Rector appointed to the living of Chilling was the Honourable and Reverend Austin Rufort. It had been expected that he would be; and, for a wonder, everybody was satisfied. Mr. Rufort did not wish to hurry Miss Annesley from her home: had she chosen to remain in it for a twelvemonth she had been welcome; but when once things were settled, she thought it well to leave. Mr. Annesley had been dead about six weeks then. Accepting the invitation offered to her, she fixed the day of her journey to London, and Thomas Kage had been solicited to receive her at the station.

‘How kind it is of you to come and meet me!’ she exclaimed in a glad accent. ‘How very kind!’

Expecting to meet none but strangers, half afraid of encountering the bustle of the great Babel, the sight of a face she knew struck upon her with joyous surprise, with more importance in fact than the slight circumstance deserved. To the low-spirited girl, full of doubts and shrinking, it really had the appearance of a fortunate omen.

‘Mrs. Annesley requested me to come; she is not well herself, and her daughter is scarcely old enough to be trusted at the station. Perhaps I might say not steady enough,’ he added with a good-natured smile, as they walked together along

the platform, and took up their standing to see the luggage thrown out of the van.

Sarah smiled too. 'I have heard Mrs. Dunn call her flighty.'

'Precisely so. She is but a young girl, full of life and merriment. Mrs. Annesley, with her ill-health, is too grave a companion for her.'

'Mrs. Annesley has very ill-health, has she not?'

'She seems to be always ailing. She has nervous headaches, for one thing. Just now she is recovering from a severe attack of bronchitis.'

'Are you very intimate with them?'

'Not very. I happened to call last evening. Mrs. Annesley had been regretting that she had no one but a servant to send here to meet you, and I said perhaps I should do to come.'

'I would rather have seen your face than any one's,' spoke Sarah with simple truth. 'You do not know how much I dread strangers.'

'Is Mrs. Annesley quite a stranger to you?'

'Very nearly so. Ten years ago my dear father and I were in London for five days, and stayed at their house—Mr. Annesley was alive then—and the following summer they came to us for a month at Chilling, with the little girl—a fair, sweet child of about seven. That is all the acquaintance I have had with them; we have not even corre-

sponded, save on any extraordinary occasion ; and I think it is very kind of Mrs. Annesley to invite me now.'

'She could do no less,' said Thomas Kage. 'Your father and her husband were brothers.'

'Only half-brothers. Mr. James Annesley was twenty years younger than papa, and they were not very cordial with each other. My dear father thought he had been much wronged in regard to the family property, which was left entirely to Mr. James Annesley : but it does not matter to recall that now. My good father put away the grievance from his heart long and long ago.'

'Had Mrs. Annesley not invited you to stay with her, Mrs. Garston would,' he remarked. 'I think she resents having been forestalled in it.'

'There's my luggage !' exclaimed Sarah. 'Box the first coming out now.'

'How many boxes have you ?'

'Two, and a small one. Mr. Rufort kindly said I might leave as much lumber as I liked at home until I saw what my plans would be. Is it not strange, Mr. Kage, that I and Lydia Dunn should cross each other ?'

'Cross each other !' he repeated, at a loss to understand what she meant.

'Don't you know ?—Mrs. Dunn is going down to the Rock to-day on a long visit. I am so sorry.

Had she been in London, the great town might have seemed less strange to me. She is a widow now, you are aware ?

‘ Yes ; these four or five months past.’

Not until they were seated in the cab did Thomas Kage speak of the loss she had sustained, and of his deep sympathy with it ; and then only by a word or two. Those who feel the deepest say the least. She understood him, and the tears came into her eyes : not very long ago *he* had gone through the same sorrow and suffering.

Mrs. Annesley, the widow, lived in Paradise-terrace. Fine substantial houses, but not to be compared to the mansions in the grand square adjoining—Paradise-square. Thomas Kage accompanied her into her house, and introduced her to its mistress, who left the fire-side and an easy-chair to receive her.

She was four-and-fifty years of age, and she looked four-and-sixty. A cold silent woman, with gray hair, straight black eyebrows, and a severe expression of face. Her heart was warmer than her manner, but neither would have set the Thames on fire ; and she was well-meaning, wishing to do her duty by all. She was apt to tell people, if they inquired, that she never enjoyed a day’s health : what with her ailments of one kind and another, and the giving way to them, she perhaps

never did. Recently she had been really ill, and would not feel recovered for a long time.

Mrs. Annesley welcomed Sarah, her niece one degree removed (if it may be called so), with as much cordiality as a woman of her cold and reserved nature could. She kissed her cheek, and said she was welcome. Sarah caught at the arm of Thomas Kage : for a momentary faintness, quite unusual, stole over her. To one who has had a happy and beloved home of her own, the entering that of a stranger is a bitter heart-sickness.

Years and years ago—more than you, my reader, would care to say you can look back to—Philip Annesley, a young man keeping his first term at the Cambridge University, heard with intense surprise and some natural shock that his father had married again. He had deemed that he and his sister were all-in-all to their father ; but, as it seemed, he was mistaken. The new wife gained full ascendancy ; later she had one son born ; and when death, some twenty years afterwards, took the old man, her husband, it was discovered that he had bequeathed the whole of his property to her, unconditionally. In her turn she bequeathed it to her own son James ; ignoring Philip, then the incumbent of Chilling ; ignoring the daughter, Mary, who had lived at home with her.

Had James Annesley been a just and right-feeling man, he would at once have divided the property into three shares, giving one each to his half-brother and sister. He did nothing of the kind; he kept the whole; and Philip in his heart resented it. Mary found a home with her brother Philip at Chilling, who was still a single man, and remained so for some years after that. When he did marry, Mary left him; James wanted her then, for he had married, and been left a widower with one little boy. Later by ever so many years, James married again, the present Mrs. Annesley, now standing up to receive Sarah and Mr. Kage, and she had one daughter.

I hope the account has been clear. With so many people and interests and marriages to speak of, ideas are apt to get a little complicated. James Annesley, when he died, did not do as his father had done—leave all he had to his wife unconditionally. The interest was to be hers for her life—a handsome income; at her death it would go to the two children, but not equally: his son by his first wife would take the larger share, the young girl the smaller. Perhaps Mrs. Annesley felt aggrieved at this, but she had no power to remedy it. Old Mrs. Garston, rapping her stick with ardour, told her to her face it was the only just thing James Annesley ever did. The son,

Walter Annesley, had been sent to the West Indies as clerk in a merchant's house there; he was getting on well, was married, and had a prospect, it was understood, of a junior partnership.

Sarah Annesley, resolutely rallying from the passing sensation of faintness—for there lived not a young woman in the world less willing to give way than she—turned from Mr. Kage to meet the young girl who had come up and waited. A bright fairy of seventeen, with a profusion of fair hair that she chose to wear in a shower of drooping curls, laughing blue eyes, and saucy features. She had no regular beauty whatever, only the great charm that youth and a kind of randomly-wild carelessness sometimes impart. The hair was beautiful; the laughing light-blue eyes were beautiful; and there the boasting ended. The nose was small, and turned up to the skies; the very pointed chin was one of the most impertinent ever seen. She was very little, not of the smallest account to look at, impudent to everybody about her except her mother, and saucy to the rest of the world. But these saucy, piquant women often sway man with an iron hand, and render him helpless.

Sarah kissed her involuntarily, and then held her at arm's length, regarding her with quite a

fond expression. The child (she quite looked like one) wore a pretty black silk, with a white-lace edging on her neck, and black ribbons falling amidst her fair hair.

‘Can this be little Belle? But perhaps I ought not to call her Belle now?’

‘Belle always,’ spoke Mrs. Annesley. ‘Annabel only when I am seriously angry with her.’

‘Is that often?’ put in Mr. Kage.

Miss Belle, in answer to his question and smile, gave him a sharp flirting rap with her jet chain. But an imperceptible sigh broke from Mrs. Annesley; it seemed to imply that she found her daughter more troublesome than perhaps Mr. Kage might have given credit for. It appeared nearly impossible to believe that that careless, laughing, blue-eyed girl could be the daughter of the staid, stony, dark-browed woman: the one so redolent of light-hearted gaiety, the other seeming never to have known it. Between thirty and forty when she married, Mrs. Annesley had been already set down as an ‘old maid’ by the generous world; she had certainly been stiff and cold as any old maid can be; and though the reproach was lifted from her, she remained stiff to the end. But the fault—it has just been said so—lay in manner more than in heart.

‘Will you show your cousin to her room,

Belle?' spoke Mrs. Annesley. 'Harriet will be there waiting, no doubt.'

The first thing Miss Belle did when she got outside the door was to plant herself at the foot of the stairs, impeding further progress, and stare into her cousin's face.

'I remember you quite well; I remember lots of things when I was younger than that; but you are looking ever so much older.'

'Of course I am,' said Sarah. 'It is ten years ago.'

'Good gracious! You must be getting an old woman.'

'Getting on that way. I shall be thirty in three years.'

'How dreadful! When I get thirty it will be all over, for I'd as soon be sixty at once. What I want to say is this—you are not going to watch me?'

'To watch you?' repeated Sarah, in a questioning tone.

'Yes, to watch me; to be a spy upon me. Because, if you are, I'll not stand it.'

'My dear child, I really do not know what you mean.'

'Yesterday, when mamma was talking about my wildness, she said how glad she was you were coming, for she should ask you to look after me

and report to her all you saw amiss. O, you can't imagine what it is at home ; she's like an old lady-abbess, looking after a flock of nuns. If my bedroom is in a mess, she groans ; if I buy a sash without first asking her, she sighs, and says I'm on the high-road to ruin. Perhaps I should be, if I had an old duenna at my heels always to whisper ill of me ; I'm sure I'd spend a crown then where I now spend half one. The other day she nearly fainted because she came into the study and found all my oil-paints spilt on the carpet. You won't tell tales of me, will you ?

‘No ; certainly not.’

‘That is a promise ?’ said Miss Belle, with a stamp of her pretty foot.

‘It is ; and I will keep it faithfully. There's the seal of it, Belle.’

Sarah bent forward and kissed the bright young face upturned to hers. Belle was a very syren ; and she had some of a syren's attributes, besides fascination.

Having seen Miss Annesley safely housed, Thomas Kage took his departure for Mrs. Garston's. He was making the afternoon into a kind of holiday, and did not go back to his chambers : but it was getting late now. Mrs. Garston had charged him to come and inform her all about Miss Annesley's arrival ; and Thomas Kage, who

had been in the habit of obeying her for many years almost as he did his mother, insensibly did it more than ever now that that mother was gone.

A stylish open vehicle on two wheels, with a stylish tiger taking care of the horse, stood before the gate as he reached it. Mr. Kage wondered whose they were, when the appearance of Captain Dawkes, jauntily treading the gravel-path, solved the problem. The gallant Captain had been making a call on the lady, whom he rather facetiously styled the 'ancient party' to his military friends. Not staying to shake hands with Mr. Kage, he ascended to his seat with a patronising nod, touched the horse, and dashed away, his purple whiskers more silken than ever, his teeth whiter, his cheeks and himself altogether blooming.

As Mr. Kage passed in at the garden-gate, Mrs. Garston met him in the pathway. On sunny days she was fond of being out of doors, and walked about the sheltered garden almost as firmly as she did twenty years before, never accepting help except from her stick, planted vigorously on the ground with every step she took. Therefore Thomas Kage did not offer his arm, but simply turned with her and kept by her side. He was in deep mourning still; the old lady wore an enormous sun-bonnet of gray silk, and a white lama shawl.

‘Did you see that turn-out?’ were the first words she addressed to him, in allusion to the equipage just gone away: and, by the tone, Thomas knew that it, or something else, had displeased her.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘The horse is a high-mettled one; Captain Dawkes must take care of him in the more crowded streets.’

Captain Dawkes was in feather again. Mrs. Garston had prevailed upon herself to pay his debts and set him free. It was some three or four months ago now. At temporary ease in the world, he lived like a man of fortune, and paid visits to Mrs. Garston as often as he could force himself to the infliction.

‘He has begun again.’

The remark was given abruptly, and Thomas Kage, whose thoughts had gone roving to other matters, really did not catch its thread.

‘Begun what, ma’am?’

‘Begun what? Why, to make more debts,’ irascibly returned Mrs. Garston. ‘I’m speaking of Barby Dawkes. He has as much cause to set up that fine tandem as I have to set up a dandy-horse. Where’s the use of your laughing, Thomas Kage?’

He was biting his lip, not to hide the smile—for he could but be open in all he did—but to

prevent its going on to a laugh. Mrs. Garston would look curious on a dandy-horse.

‘It is not a tandem, ma’am.’

‘It is a tandem! Why do you contradict? It’s a tandem that he has set up; he told me so to my face. There may be one horse in the shafts to-day, but he puts another on at times, and always in the country. I told him he’d look more consistent in a wheelbarrow drawn by two gray jack-asses.’

‘If Captain Dawkes is tolerably cautious in other matters, he can afford to keep two horses,’ spoke Mr. Kage, who would willingly have smoothed away displeasure from his worst enemy.

‘If! Did you ever hear of Barby Dawkes being cautious? I set him free with the world last March. This is June; and I’d lay you the worth of these two houses, yours and mine, that he has already made a string of debts a yard long: now, then, Thomas Kage!’

Thomas Kage strolled on the lawn by the old lady’s side in silence. He thought it quite probable that the already-contracted debts might be two yards long, instead of one; but he would not say so.

‘I told Barby what it would be. I told Keziah that my setting him free, if I did do it, would only be the signal for him to begin again to run up

fresh liabilities; and he is doing it. Don't tell me !'

'I suppose he says he is not?'

'He'd not say he is to me, be you sure of that; but I have warned him—and take you notice of it, Thomas Kage. When he stood up before me smiling, not five minutes ago, I warned him as plainly as words can do it. "Run 'em up," I said to him, "run up a cartload of 'em, if you choose, Barby Dawkes; but you may find it much harder to get me to discharge 'em than you have done." Whatever comes of it, he can't say I didn't warn him. There! I shall sit down.'

She took her seat on a green bench under a fine old spreading tree. Mr. Kage placed himself by her, and began speaking of the arrival of Miss Annesley from Chilling. It was rather a sore subject with Mrs. Garston: first, because Sarah Annesley had been left without provision; and secondly, that she had been forestalled by Mrs. Annesley in the invitation to stay in London.

'Thirty pounds a-year, perhaps under it!' commented the old lady, striking her stick sharply on the soft grass. 'Philip Annesley had three hundred a-year, and a house to live in, and might have done better for her. We were playfellows together when we were children, he and I; but I was the elder by some five years. I remember

once a mad cow ran after us, and we leaped a dwarf wall, and scrambled through a thick blackberry-hedge. You'd not think it now.'

'You could not do it now,' was his answer.

'I thought Philip would have had more sense : his brains were sharp as a boy. Nobody should live up to their income if they've children to provide for ; mark you that, Thomas Kage. But I hope it will be a long while before you put yourself in the way of having any.'

A very conscious flush crossed his cheek. Within the last day or two a possible view of advancement had been laid before him ; and, if he accepted it—and Caroline Kage—

'I wonder she could stomach that invitation of Mrs. Annesley's !' came the interruption to his thoughts in the quaint language of the old lady, which belonged to a bygone day. 'I do ; and I don't think her father would have liked her to, neither. If ever man was ill-used among 'em, he was. Philip Annesley was brought up to think he'd succeed to the half of his father's property, and his sister to the other half. Old Annesley marries again, drivels on for twenty years in his tight keeping under his new wife's thumb, and then dies and leaves every shilling to *her* son James. It's all very well to say Philip forgave 'em, as a good clergyman and Christian

should ; but I'll be whipped if he must not have been an uncommon good one to do it.'

'I think he was that, Mrs. Garston.'

'I don't say the present Mrs. Annesley, James's widow, had any hand in the injustice ; she didn't know 'em at the time ; but she became James's wife afterwards, and that would have been enough to make some people resent it on her as belonging to them. She enjoys the money too—seven hundred a-year, Thomas.'

'Is it so much as that ?'

'It is that in hard income, my dear ; and there was furniture, and plate, and accumulated money besides. James did not make quite so unjust a will as his wretched old father : he left his wife a life-interest only ; at her death the son in the West Indies gets four hundred a-year of it ; the girl three ; the furniture and things to go as Mrs. Annesley chooses. And we need not speculate upon who'll get that, considering the girl is her daughter, the young man only her step-son. But James never remembered the suppressed claims of the Philip Annesleys ; and I say I'd not have accepted an invitation from any of the lot, had I been Philip's daughter. What does she say about those Kages ?'

The transition of subject was abrupt. Thomas, who had been sitting in a reverie, his eyes

bent on the grass, hearing and not hearing, looked up.

‘What Kages, ma’am?’

Mrs. Garston lifted her stick as if she had a mind to strike him, bringing it down on the grass with a thump.

‘If you get into the habit of useless cavilling, Thomas Kage, you’ll hear a bit of my mind. I mean those Kages down at Chilling—the woman with the affectation and the smelling-bottles. Her soft voice is as false as Barby Dawkes’s smile when he tells me he is living within his income. *I* knew her as Caroline Gunse, and what she was; and her daughter takes after her. Did I ever know any other Kages, pray, but them, except yourself and your dear mother? Do *you* know any?’

‘No.’

‘Very well, then, why need you ask me what Kages? What does Sarah Annesley say about them?’

‘She said nothing to me, except that they are well. Miss Annesley will come and see you herself to-morrow. She is vexed at one thing—that Mrs. Dunn should have gone down home just at this time, and regrets her absence very much.’

‘A fine thing *she* is to regret!’ scornfully spoke Mrs. Garston.

‘I fancy Miss Annesley was particularly intimate with her when she was Lydia Canterbury; more so than with the other sisters.’

‘Then why could not Lydia Dunn have put off her visit home for a week, and stayed here to receive her?’ sensibly spoke Mrs. Garston. ‘Perhaps she cares for Lydia Dunn more than Lydia Dunn cares for her. *My* opinion is, if you wish to know it, that Mrs. Lydia Dunn never cared for anybody but her own blessed self. Now, then! and you may tell Philip Annesley’s daughter that I say it. Where are you going, Thomas?’

‘Home.’

‘You are not; you are going to dine with me. Don’t you know that you are worth fifty thousand of such men as Barnaby Dawkes?’

He smiled, and took out his watch. It wanted half-an-hour to her usual dinner-hour. Mrs. Garston’s invitations were commands, and might not be rejected when it was possible to accede to them.

‘Thank you,’ he said; ‘I will come back by six; but I expect a letter will be waiting for me at home, and I may have to write an answer to it.’

It was there. When he got home, the letter was staring him in the face. He opened it, not

eagerly, but slowly and thoughtfully, as if it were big with some momentous fate that he felt half-afraid to read of.

A proposition had been made to Thomas Kage to go out to India. An influential friend, Lord Elster, had obtained the promise of an appointment for him there, and Mr. Kage was expecting the bonâ-fide offer of it daily. He thought perhaps this letter contained it; but he found he was mistaken, that he would have to wait yet for some days. Holding the letter open still when read, for it must be replied to, he sat in doubt and deep reflection.

Not in doubt as to whether the offer would come—of that he was as sure as he could be; but in doubt whether or not to accept it when it came. He had not made up his mind. In good truth, he was advancing so slowly in his profession—the case frequently with young barristers—that he had grown disheartened. He got enough to keep him and his moderate household in necessities; and Lady Kage, as may be remembered, had provided for the year's rent; but of prospects he seemed to have none. The salary of the appointment in India would commence at seven hundred a-year, and go on increasing.

Had there been no one in the question but himself, he would not have hesitated one moment

over the decision—to reject it. To go to India, or to any other country, for an indefinite number of years, would seem to him no better than banishment. Some men like to go a-roving; he did not. He loved his own country; he loved his profession, and looked forward to rise in it in time. In time—there was the difficulty.

For there existed something that he loved better than all—Caroline Kage. If he remained at home, there appeared little chance of his ever telling that love. He could not expect her to wait years and years, until fortune came to him; or, if she would, her mother would certainly not allow her. But if he closed with this offer to go to the East when it should be made, he thought he might without breach of honour ask her to go with him.

That she loved him with her whole being he knew. Had he doubted before, her conduct at Easter, when he was at Chilling, was sufficient to show it to him. His heart was at rest; a soft glow stole across his thin cheeks, a tender light into his eyes, in thinking of her. Even now, as he sat there, his every pulse was beating with happiness. It is true, she had not written to him once since Easter; but he knew the fault lay with Mrs. Kage. O, if she—if they—should deem this Indian project worth entering upon! And he

might take her out with him, his wife ! He fully believed it might be so.

And Thomas Kage began to pen an answer to the letter in his hand, the whole world, to his entranced sight, seeming to be flooded with an atmosphere of brightness.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE FEAR.

A BRILLIANT day in June. In the sweet summer-room facing the north, so grateful to the sight and senses in blazing weather, sat the four daughters of George Canterbury. Mrs. Dunn was in deep black robes and a widow's cap. The others had assumed slight mourning, and wore muslins.

It was some days now since Mrs. Dunn had arrived at the Rock, purposing to make a long visit. They had been pressing her to do it ever since her husband's death, but the settlement of his affairs had kept her in town. She was left (as she considered) very badly off. Mr. Dunn, who was member for the county when Lydia Canterbury married him, was not a rich man. He had something to do with iron; his wife never took the trouble to ascertain precisely what; and a great portion of his interest in the business,

whatever it might be, went from him at his death. Mrs. Dunn would have about twelve or fourteen hundred a-year; it was nothing compared with what she expected to inherit from her father, nothing to the fabulous wealth of the Rock. So Lydia Dunn considered herself hardly used by Fortune, and wondered how she should exist.

She was several years younger than her sister Olive, and a plain likeness of her. A less tall figure, and without Olive's majesty, with more than a tendency to plumpness, which Olive had not. Her hair was of the same beautiful shade of purple-black; her features wanted the refined grace of Olive's, while they displayed the resolution. Mrs. Dunn was positive, out-spoken, very fond of domineering; Olive, quietly resolute, was full of gracious courtesy. Rumour went—it was impossible to know whether it spoke truth—that Mr. Dunn had ventured to address Miss Canterbury first, and, upon finding out his mistake, had transferred his hopes to Lydia.

Whether that might have been the case or not, one fact was certain—Lydia knew nothing of it. If any such thing had passed, it was confined to Miss Canterbury's own breast, and Lydia married Mr. Dunn in peace. The very large fortune to which the Miss Canterburys were heiresses, caused

them to be marks for suitors—great prizes to be shot for. High and low alike cast a longing eye on them; but the consciousness that this must inevitably be the case caused the Miss Canterburys to be exceedingly inaccessible. It was not that they would have made their riches any bar, but the fear lest those riches were the attraction, and not themselves, lay more or less upon their minds always. Fifteen curates in all, during the last half-dozen years, had laid themselves and their gowns at the feet of one or other of the heiresses at the Rock—worthy men, no doubt, but not quite free from suspicion as to motives. Jane and Leta were wont to wish, to some extent in earnest, that they had been born portionless.

The window was thrown open to the steady north landscape lying around in its beauty, with its subdued light, its welcome shade. On this side the park was not extensive—a mere strip—and beyond it lay the green fields that would lead by a cross-road to Aberton. At the end of this first field—a large one, and divided by a fence, with a stile in the middle—was situated the dwelling of Mrs. Kage. June roses, lilies, sweet-scented flowers of many colours, threw up their perfume from the beds immediately underneath the windows, imbuing the atmosphere of the room

with sweetness. It was the young ladies' favourite sitting-room. Not a showroom by any means, though the pictures on the delicately-papered walls were of value, and the furniture was of costly green-and-gold, but rather an *undress* room, in which they worked and read and played and talked, and might make an untidy litter at will.

Olive and Jane were busy to-day—the one cutting out work for the charity-school, the other tacking the pieces together. Staid, steady, well-conducted ladies, the Miss Canterburys directed the schools judiciously, and other parish benefits, of which they were the chief supporters. Mrs. Dunn sat back in an easy-chair near the window, doing nothing, as usual—all the industry she possessed lay in her tongue; and Millicent was at the piano trying a new piece very softly and quietly.

‘That is wrong, I am sure, Leta.’

It was Mrs. Dunn who spoke, in the quick abrupt way very usual with her. She was the only really good musician of the family; her taste for it was innate, and something or other in the playing had grated on her correct ear.

Leta played to the end of the page, and then rose from the piano. Conscious of her own inferior skill, she did not often care to try new pieces before Mrs. Dunn.

‘I have played an hour,’ she remarked, ‘and Olive tells me that is quite long enough at one time.’

Going to a writing-table, Leta opened one of the desks there, her own, with the intention of beginning a letter to Miss Annesley. Putting the writing-paper before her, she suddenly remembered that some information concerning parish interests, which Sarah had asked for, was not yet obtained.

‘O dear! I can’t write until to-morrow,’ cried Leta. ‘Lydia, what sort of people are they where she is gone?’

‘Where who is gone?’ naturally demanded Mrs. Dunn, who could not be supposed to see into her sister’s thoughts.

‘Sarah Annesley.’

‘I don’t know what you mean by “sort.” Mrs. Annesley is a widow, with a flighty young daughter. Quite middle-class people, living quietly with three maid-servants in Paradise-terrace—near to old Mrs. Garston’s, you know. They are rather friendly with her.’

‘I wish Mrs. Garston had invited Sarah,’ spoke Leta earnestly. ‘She might as well; she took a wonderful liking for her when we were at Little Bay last autumn. Middle-class people! I don’t suppose Sarah will be very happy there.’

‘Now don’t you run away with wrong notions, Miss Millicent,’ sharply enjoined Mrs. Dunn. ‘The Annesleys are gentlepeople, and know what’s what. In calling them middle-class, I alluded to their moderate house and style of living. My late husband’s brother, Richard Dunn, is intimate there. As to Sarah Annesley, she is not the first of us who has had to bend to adverse circumstances: look at me, left with nothing a-year!’

Leta bent her face to hide a smile. Mrs. Dunn’s grievance of her ‘nothing a-year’ had become a joke between the other sisters. Leta toyed with her writing-paper; it was tiresome to sit down to her desk, and then find that it was to no purpose.

‘Olive,’ she said, looking up, ‘may I write a note to ask Caroline Kage to come here for the day?’

Miss Canterbury made no reply. She was puzzled over her work just then, counting pieces. Millicent deferred to her as she would to a mother.

‘This is wrong, Jane. Nine pairs of sleeves, and only eight pairs of gussets: you must have miscounted.—What was it you asked me, Leta?’

‘If I may send for Caroline Kage.’

‘Caroline Kage is always here,’ interrupted Mrs. Dunn. ‘She was here to tea yesterday, and

to luncheon the day before; and for the whole morning, with her mother, the day before that. You had better have her to live here, Millicent.'

The words were delivered with so much acrimony that Millicent looked at Mrs. Dunn in pure astonishment. Miss Canterbury, her interest buried in the gussets and sleeves, did not notice the tone, though she heard the words.

'That is just what Millicent would like—to have her to live here, Lydia,' Olive said with a smile.

'Ah!' returned Lydia, flicking her broad-hemmed handkerchief at a wasp that seemed inclined to enter.

'Caroline Kage is very pleasant, Lydia; we all like her,' put in Jane.

'A pretty, good-natured sort of girl; not much in her,' somewhat slightly remarked Miss Canterbury.

'If she were one of earth's young-lady angels, her constant intrusion would be irksome,' returned Mrs. Dunn. 'The Chinese have a proverb, "Pay your visits only on alternate days, lest by continual going you weary your friends and they become estranged from you." It is full of wisdom.'

'Intrusion!' exclaimed Millicent, disregarding the proverb.

‘Yes, intrusion,’ decisively repeated Mrs. Dunn.

‘But, Lydia, we are pleased to have her.’

Jane Canterbury lifted her scissors from the calico, and turned round to address Mrs. Dunn.

‘The fact is, Lydia, they have grown thus intimate from Leta’s want of other companions. We are older than she is, and have different interests. The Kages are our nearest neighbours, you know, and she and Caroline have been so much together that an affection has sprung up between them.’

Mrs. Dunn lost some of her angry look. ‘Ever the same, Jane; smoothing down difficulties for everybody. But I do think it is time you left off that unmeaning word, “Leta:” I assure you it does not contribute to Millicent’s dignity.’

‘I don’t think it does,’ smiled Jane. ‘But it is a long-used habit; just as is the coming here of Caroline Kage: and every-day habits are hard to relinquish.’

‘May I write, Olive?’ resumed Millicent, who had sat with her pen in hand and paper before her, breaking the silence that had ensued.

Mrs. Dunn made a gesture of impatience; and her words, for she spoke before Olive, were impatiently uttered.

‘Caroline Kage is better where she is than here. Let her be.’

‘Yes, yes,’ decided Olive hastily, considering that Mrs. Dunn, both as a married woman and as a visitor, should be especially deferred to; ‘we will not have Caroline to-day, Millicent.’

Millicent slowly closed her writing-desk, and then leaned her elbow upon it and her cheek upon her hand, her face plainly expressing disappointment. She was sincerely attached to Caroline: and it might be—it might be, that she hungered for a word of news of Thomas Kage. Never once, since that visit of his at Easter, when he had dined at the Rock, had his name passed Caroline’s lips. Before that period she had been always speaking of him. Caroline herself had seemed changed since; the once light, trifling girl had become thoughtful and silent. Once, and once only, Leta had taken courage to ask after Mr. Kage: ‘We know nothing of him,’ was Caroline’s short answer.

The door opened, and Mr. Canterbury put his head in, as if asking permission to enter. The room belonged so exclusively to his daughters that he seemed to think he had no right in it uninvited.

‘Come in, papa.’

There was a change in Mr. Canterbury. The head, growing so thin of hair at the top, was now surmounted by an auburn wig of curly luxuri-

ance, almost as natural as though it grew there. An eyeglass dangled on his waistcoat; his morning-clothes were cut in the most approved style of a fashionable London tailor. In fact, Mr. Canterbury would have looked like a young dandy had he not been an old man.

‘I think I shall ride into Aberton, Olive. Have you any commands?’

‘Thank you, papa; no. Not this morning.’

‘Is your head better, Lydia?’ he inquired of Mrs. Dunn, who had complained of headache at breakfast.

‘It aches still, papa; I have had it a good deal lately. I think these hot caps help to give it to me,’ she added, pushing her widow’s cap back on her head.

‘Why do you wear them, then?’

‘O well, papa, you know it is the custom. Had I not followed it, people would have been found to say I had not cared for my husband.’

‘I should not let what such people could say trouble me,’ sensibly remarked Mr. Canterbury.—‘You look as if you had the headache, also,’ he added to Millicent, his gaze falling on her.

‘No, I have not,’ said she, rousing herself, and rising from her seat.

‘What’s the matter, then?’

‘Not much, papa.’

‘Not much! What is it?’

‘I only felt disappointed,’ explained Leta shortly, a little vexed at having to confess it.

‘What at?’ persisted Mr. Canterbury, who did not like to see his daughters’ faces clouded, especially hers, who had been in a degree the plaything of them all—Leta.

‘I wanted to write for Caroline Kage to come and spend the day here, and Olive will not let me.’

‘Caroline Kage is here too much; she inundates us,’ sharply interrupted Mrs. Dunn in a voice of authority. ‘Not a day since I came home have we been free from Caroline Kage. Seven days I have been here, and seven visits, some of them lasting for hours, we have had of that girl’s. It is unreasonable.’

There was a pause; Mr. Canterbury broke it. Leta, feeling uncomfortable at having caused the unpleasantness, went and stood at the window.

‘Why do you dislike her, Lydia?’ he asked.

‘O, I don’t dislike her, papa,’ returned Mrs. Dunn, suppressing her irritation badly: ‘but I consider that she is here too much.’

‘Here is Caroline herself, coming up!’ exclaimed Millicent.

Miss Kage was advancing underneath the window then; they heard her voice as she looked up and spoke to Leta. Mr. Canterbury, about to

quit the room, turned with his hand on the door.

‘Then, as she is here, you can ask her to stay for the day,’ he said, looking at Olive. ‘Why not? I do not like to see Millicent with a sad face,’ he concluded, as if accounting for his decision.

Mr. Canterbury met Miss Kage in the hall, and two or three minutes elapsed before she came to the room—alone; a remarkably pretty girl this morning, in her pink-muslin dress, and a white bonnet as light and airy as herself.

‘You have come to save us the trouble of sending for you, Caroline,’ spoke Millicent, forgetting vexation in the exuberance of her spirits. ‘We want you to remain the day.’

‘I cannot remain ten minutes,’ replied Miss Kage. ‘Many thanks.’

‘O, I am so sorry!’ exclaimed Millicent. ‘Ten minutes, Caroline! where was the use of your coming at all?’

‘I came for mamma. She has had one of those tiresome letters again, and sent me with it to Mr. Canterbury. I have given it to him.’

‘But why can you not remain?’

‘Because my cousin has just arrived on one of his flying visits, and I must go back home.’

‘What cousin?’ asked Olive.

‘Thomas Kage.’

‘Caroline,’ said Jane archly, ‘I fancy that cousin of yours has some other motive than cousinship in these flying visits of his.’

Miss Kage tossed her head; she had caught Jane’s meaning aptly. It was some weeks now since she had resolved to put old feelings behind her, to regard them as though they had never been.

‘What an idea, Miss Jane! Certainly not. Thomas Kage is grave as a judge, and poor as any church-mouse. You are quite wrong. As if I would encourage *him*!’

The vivid blush rising on her face faded away to a death-like paleness. Leta Canterbury, shaded by the curtain, saw it, and wondered.

‘You might tolerate a worse,’ said Mrs. Dunn in her strong tones, the first words she had spoken. ‘Thomas Kage is one of the worthiest of created men.’

‘Is he?’ rejoined Caroline, with a painful effort to be careless. ‘He is very poor.’

‘I don’t care whether he is poor or rich; you’ll not find another like him, search the world through.’

Olive turned round. She could not understand her sister Lydia this morning, and felt thoroughly ashamed of her sharp rudeness.

‘Will you spend to-morrow with Leta, my dear?’ she said pleasantly to Caroline.

‘Yes, thank you, Miss Canterbury. I shall be very glad.’

She wished them good-morning, and departed. Leta went to the end of the room, and began to sort some silks for her embroidery. Olive and Jane remained at their useful work over the table.

‘What brought her up with that letter?’ abruptly cried Mrs. Dunn, turning her chair from the window, so as to face her sisters.

Their surprise increased. Lydia had always been fond of setting the world to rights, and interfering in what did not concern her; but this acrimonious turn of mind was something new.

‘Caroline said Mrs. Kage sent her with the letter,’ replied Jane meekly. ‘Poor Mrs. Kage has had some troublesome law-business to contend with lately, and papa advises her upon it, Lydia.’

‘Law-business!’ retorted Lydia, with an angry scoff.

‘Law-business of some nature: I don’t understand it. How lovely Caroline was looking this morning!’

‘And how well she dresses!’ remarked Olive. ‘Those lace-sleeves were real Brussels. I wonder how they manage it.’

‘I mean, what brought *her* up with it?’ con-

tinued Mrs. Dunn, tapping her foot with impatience. 'Why could Mrs. Kage not have sent it by a servant?'

'I daresay Caroline was glad to bring it herself. What has put you out, Lydia?'

Mrs. Dunn did not say. She took up a book and began to read. But she seemed to grow restless: now turning the leaves forward, now backward as if her mind or her temper would not get straight.

'I have no green of the right shade,' cried Leta, looking up from her silks. 'May I go out for it, Olive?'

'Where to?—Chilling? You would never get it there.'

'I think I might; it is the dark green. At least, I can try, Olive, if you have no objection.'

'None at all. You can carry some of this work to the school at the same time.'

A small bundle was made up, and given to Leta when she came in with her things on. Mrs. Dunn, whose restlessness seemed on the increase, presently flung her book down, and stood at the window, fanning her hot and angry face. Suddenly she put up her hands to shade her eyes, as if looking at something, and then turned with a hasty movement to open the doors of an ornamental cabinet.

‘Where is the glass that used to be kept here?’

‘The small telescope, do you mean, Lydia? Poor Edgar took it out with him one day just before he died, and lost it.’

‘The large one, then?’

‘O—that? I don’t know where that is,’ slowly added Miss Canterbury. ‘Somewhere in papa’s possession, I fancy.’

‘The house seems quite upset since I left it—nothing to be found,’ muttered Mrs. Dunn, taking up her post at the window again. ‘As to me, I am more near-sighted than ever.’

‘Did you want to discern anything?’ asked Jane, kindly leaving her seat to join Mrs. Dunn. ‘Perhaps I can see it for you.’

‘Look at those two in the distance, leaning—as it seems to me—on a stile, and talking. Is not one of them papa?’

‘Yes,’ said Jane, casting her good sight to the spot. ‘Papa and—yes, and Caroline Kage. I can see her pink dress. He has gone after her, I daresay, to send a message to her mother about the letter.’

‘And perhaps to repeat my invitation for to-morrow,’ added Olive, ‘though he does not know of it.’

‘Or to inquire why she cannot remain to-day,’

said Jane, returning to her work. 'Papa is ever thinking for us.'

'You blind geese! you simple women!' exclaimed Mrs. Dunn, in an accent of earnestness so impassioned that they dropped what they held, and gazed at her in startled alarm. 'Is it possible that your eyes and understanding have been closed?' she continued, flinging herself back in the arm-chair. 'Olive, where have yours been? Jane is meek and unsuspecting; Millicent is young; but you! Olive, are you quite blind, quite oblivious to what is going on?'

'What *is* going on?' demanded Olive, when her astonishment allowed her to speak.

'It is a sin and a shame that you should need to ask.'

Olive Canterbury felt just a little aggrieved at being thus called to account by her younger sister; she, the efficient mistress. She waited to draw a thread in the linen, and then spoke with calm impassibility.

'What is it that you detect amiss? I look closely after the household in all requisite things.'

'More closely than you will look in future; more closely than you will have the opportunity of doing. You will not be long the house's mistress.'

‘Indeed!’ said Olive.—‘Jane, give me the large scissors.’

‘Olive! Olive! you are treating me as if I were a simpleton.—Jane, put down that wretched work, and listen; I am in earnest. I say that Olive will not much longer be here the ruler.’

She did seem in earnest. Nevertheless, they thought her intellects must be wandering. Jane let her delicate hands drop idly on the work. Her ideas had taken a curious turn: she could only think the words applied to Olive’s possible death.

‘What is it that you are fearing, Lydia? Olive is quite well. She always looks pale in hot weather.’

‘O, you—you idiots!’ returned Mrs. Dunn, wringing her hands; ‘was there ever blindness like unto yours? It is not Olive that there’s anything the matter with, but your father. He is turning foolish in his old age. He is going to put a mistress over you.’

They were, indeed, blindly unsuspicious. ‘A mistress!’ slowly repeated Miss Canterbury, not yet understanding.

‘Yes, a mistress; for the house and for you. A second wife.’

A pause of moments: it needed that, to take in the sense of the words. Jane’s face, generally so calm, became painfully agitated. Olive turned

red with indignation. Her well-balanced mind refused to believe a word of the assertion.

‘Lydia, I did not think you were capable of saying this.’

‘But if it be true? And I tell you that it *is*. Your father has fixed upon a second wife as surely as that we sit here.’

‘Of whom can you be thinking?’ asked Miss Canterbury, slightly perplexed, as her thoughts went out to the neighbourhood and home again. ‘Of Mrs. Kage?’

‘No. I wish it was: it would be the less evil of the two. It is the girl—Caroline.’

‘O Lydia!’ was simultaneously uttered, in resentful incredulity.

Mrs. Dunn rose from her seat again: she seized Olive with one hand, Jane with the other, and pulled them towards the window.

‘Are they gone? No, not yet. I can see the figures, indistinct figures to me. To Jane they are plain; perhaps to you, also, Olive. They are talking still.’

‘And if they are,’ said the angry Olive, ‘what does that prove? If papa chooses to stand talking to a child, and to talk all day long, what is there in that?’

‘Not much—in that alone: he might so stand talking to me or to you. You have no cause to

be angry with me, Olive : you will find it too true. I had my suspicions the very first day of my return.'

The bare idea in itself, apart from its possible truth, that Mrs. Dunn's words presented to these ladies, was exceedingly unpleasant and unpalatable ; it might not be too much to say repulsive. In spite of their hitherto complete unconsciousness, a miserable feeling arose in either heart, as they stood looking at the figures in the distance.

'A child like Caroline Kage!' remonstrated Miss Canterbury, determined to combat to the end.

'There's the worst of the evil—a child,' said Mrs. Dunn. 'Had he married one of his own age, or near to it, it would not have been so bad for us ; it would have been more seemly in every way. Though what on earth he can want to marry at all for, after being a widower all these years, I cannot tell.'

Jane's eyes were full of tears.

'It is not likely that it can be true, Lydia ; it is not probable. How can you have formed so strange a notion ?'

'Just as you might have formed it, had scales not been over your sight. The most extraordinary events take place under people's noses every day, and they cannot see them. This was your case.

I came fresh into the house, with my eyes and understanding wide awake, and I saw it all.'

'Saw what? What is there to see?' persisted Miss Canterbury, in as irritable a tone as Mrs. Dunn herself might have used — she, the ever-gracious woman.

'Various little points, which, taken together, make an ominous whole,' was the answer. 'Though you might say that this was nothing, and that was nothing, looked at separately.'

The figures at the stile had parted now, and Mr. Canterbury was on his way back again. Some other gentleman, who had come up to the spot, was walking on with Caroline.

'When I got here a week ago, and papa came out to the carriage to see me, I was so struck by his appearance, that for a moment I could not greet him,' said Mrs. Dunn. 'Where was there so negligent a man in regard to dress as he used to be? He had on a white waistcoat; his white wristbands were displayed; and an eyeglass hung from an invisible chain. When did he ever put on a white waistcoat in the daytime? or show the ghost of a wristband? or discard his spectacles for an eyeglass?'

'I think he took to show his wristbands when he was in mourning for Edgar,' interposed Jane.

‘I don’t care when he took to show them. Not then ; or, if he did, he left it off again : it is a new thing now. Everything’s new about him, and it must have a purpose,’ argued Mrs. Dunn.

There was a most uncomfortable silence.

‘And his wig!’ resumed Mrs. Dunn. ‘Was there ever such a dandified thing seen ? Look at it!’

‘The top of his head was getting so bald : that’s why he took to a wig,’ spoke Jane in a low tone.

‘Rubbish!’ said Mrs. Dunn. ‘He’d no more have cared for his bald head, when there was only you to look at it, than he’d have cared for flying. Have it, if you like, that he did wish for a wig : need he have gone and bought a thing only fit for a turning dummy in a hairdresser’s window—a top-knot of perfumed curls!’

‘We did say it was too young for papa the first morning he came down to breakfast in it,’ murmured Jane.

‘He has had his three teeth put in,’ pursued Mrs. Dunn.

‘They were out,’ said Jane.

‘They had been out nearly as long as I can remember ; certainly before mamma died. Why should he have taken a sudden freak to have them put in now, after all these years ? He’ll be putting

rouge on his cheeks next: they say some men do it.'

'Lydia, I will not have you speak so of your father,' reproved Olive, her feelings stung to the quick.

'Very well; I'll let him alone. Turn to Caroline Kage. Do you suppose she comes here, so persistently, for you girls?—dresses up her pretty face in smiles for your benefit? Why does papa stand by when she is singing? Why does he laugh, and joke, and whisper—I have seen him whisper to her—and why does he walk home with her in an evening, as he nearly always does?'

'I believe that he has only paid her these attentions as he might pay them to any other child—paid them partly because she is a child,' stoutly spoke Olive.

'Has he!' sarcastically retorted Mrs. Dunn.

'It never occurred to me to think otherwise, Lydia.'

'Well, does it occur to you now—now that the clue has been given?'

Miss Canterbury did not answer. The clue, as Mrs. Dunn called it, was forcing its way to terrible conviction, in spite of her assumption of disbelief. Jane felt wretched, and stood with a blank face of distress.

'That you have helped this on, perhaps even

led to it wholly, by having her here so much, is certain,' said Mrs. Dunn, with the air of one who has received a deep injury. 'How you could have been so obtuse I cannot imagine, when the very first hour I saw them together was enough for me.'

'You have had so much more experience than we have; you have been out in the world,' urged Jane deprecatingly. 'And I think, Lydia, that being married must tend to enlarge the understanding in regard to experience of mankind.'

'It just does,' emphatically pronounced Mrs. Dunn; 'if you mean as to their tricks and turns. As long as we are girls at home, the men seem to us like so many saints, who could not go wrong if they were paid for it; but that delusion wears off uncommonly quick, I can tell you, when we go out amongst them. I don't complain of *my* late husband; he was a good one personally; but I learnt a little as to men in general.'

How all this grated on the ears of Miss Canterbury, she alone could have told. Not for many a long year had such a burden of dread taken up its seat within her.

'O, Lydia, I trust—I trust you are mistaken!' escaped from her full heart. 'Or at least, if not, that the mischief may be averted.'

'Mistaken I am not, Olive; but as to averting it, that's another thing. I do not say matters

have gone so far as to prevent that,' continued Mrs. Dunn, somewhat qualifying her former hasty words. 'Papa has got an idea in his head, for certain, as to Caroline Kage; but he may not commit himself to irredeemable folly.'

'Here he is, coming through the gate,' observed Jane.

They looked at him, one and all, as he turned in from the park to the grounds and bore round for the front of the house, where his groom was waiting with the horses, withdrawing themselves a little from the window as they gazed. Mr. Canterbury was presented to their view in a new and curious aspect. Not but that *he* was the same; only their ideas in regard to him had undergone a change.

'God help us all, if it should be so!' fervently aspirated Olive under her breath.

O wily Mrs. Kage! It was she who had brought about this undesirable consummation of things; for Lydia Dunn was not mistaken. Coming fresh upon the scene, with all her wits about her, vividly open to all impressions, she had seen what the lookers-on had failed to detect even by the smallest suspicion.

Casting about for a desirable establishment for her daughter, Mrs. Kage had laid covetous eyes on the Rock. It's true it had its disadvantages—

she could not conceal that from herself; but think of its wealth! Mr. Canterbury had long left sixty behind him, and his grown-up children, all of them older than Caroline, were fixtures in the house. But with a fortune such as his, what might not be overlooked? she mentally argued. Certainly all minor difficulties. And if Caroline could only be persuaded—— At this point of her weaving, Mrs. Kage invariably lost the thread.

The web was begun, and grew. Perhaps Mrs. Kage and Mr. Canterbury went in for nearly an equal share in its work; though the lady was undoubtedly the primary originator, and set it on a-weaving. Fortune sometimes favours these schemes, as if the goddess herself were an arch-plotter: and it was the case here. Mrs. Kage got into some legal difficulty, touching a good sum of money sought to be charged upon the very small property she had inherited from her sister. Thomas Kage would have been the proper man to apply to—he could have set it right in no time; but Mrs. Kage shrank from his very name; for that Caroline was wilful enough to care for him as she would never care for any one else, Mrs. Kage had become convinced of at Easter. No; any one rather than him; and Mrs. Kage contrived to find another, and to kill two birds with one stone. She consulted Mr. Canterbury. That gentleman, possess-

ing about as much legal acumen as one of the deer in his own park, but considering himself equal to the best lawyer going, was both ready and willing to be consulted, and went into the affair with energy. It involved many visits to Mrs. Kage, where he was always plunged amidst the fascinations of Caroline, who was not slow to exercise them. It involved visits back to Mr. Canterbury; letters to be shown, fresh thoughts and fears to be verbally told; and Caroline was generally chosen for the messenger. This bore rapid fruit. When elderly gentlemen fall into an attachment of this kind, they do it in a great hurry, as if time were coming to an end before the year were out; and Mr. Canterbury served for an exemplification. Caroline was as wise as he: before the man had advanced farther than thinking her a sweet, lovable, charming girl, and showing in manner that he thought it, she saw what kind of an end was to supervene. If she did not positively encourage his admiration, she certainly never repelled it; but she saw it needed no specific encouragement. In the coquetry of a light-minded woman—and Caroline had it and exercised it in abundance—she was content to be made covert love to, to feed Mr. Canterbury's growing dreams, and to let the future take care of itself. Whether she should accept Mr. Canterbury, when the time came for

a decision, and become mistress of the Rock and its wide revenues; or whether she should laugh prettily, and stare at him with wide-open eyes of wondering simplicity while she rejected him, Caroline was unable to foresee, and did not care to think. Ever and anon a vision came over her of Thomas Kage's making his unexpected appearance at Chilling, with the news that he had dropped into a large fortune through some old relative or friend (Mrs. Garston, say) who had conveniently died, and asking her, Caroline, to share it with him. So wildly would her bosom throb with its momentary rapture, that she had to press her hands there.

CHAPTER IX.

SUNSHINE GONE OUT FOR EVER.

THE advance portion of Caroline Kage's delusive dream was suddenly realised. Between ten and eleven o'clock on a brilliant June morning—the one mentioned in the last chapter—Thomas Kage walked in. Caroline's heart leaped up within her; in her tumultuous joy, she could scarcely believe his appearance real.

And Mrs. Kage's spirits went down in about an equal proportion. Mr. Canterbury's attentions had become so palpable, that Mrs. Kage thought some climax must be at hand, or ought to be. Letters touching her law-business arrived conveniently quick: one that same morning. She had been telling Caroline to take it up to Mr. Canterbury, and what to say about it, when they were thus broken in upon by Thomas Kage. Mrs. Kage was struck into a state of dismay at the unwelcome interruption, as she thought of the mischief

it might work to the smooth on-flow of existing things. In answer to her short questions, he said he had taken the night-train down to Aberton ; and he said no more. Mrs. Kage inwardly wished the train had buried itself in some dangerous cutting en route, and him with it.

‘Business at Aberton, I suppose, as usual,’ she observed, resentfully.

‘No, I had no business at Aberton this time,’ was Mr. Kage’s answer.

‘You must have had a warm walk from there.’

‘Not very. It is an exceedingly delightful morning, Mrs. Kage, with a pleasant breeze.—Will you come out with me presently, and try it?’ he added pointedly to Caroline.

She neither said yes nor no. His coming down had put her into a perplexing state of indecision. *Was* that vision of hers about to be realised? Had fortune come to him? Quite accidentally, Mrs. Kage caused the question to be solved.

‘Are you getting on well in your profession?’

‘Not well; very slowly,’ he answered. ‘In fact, so slowly, that I am not sure but I shall give it up, and try my luck in another line.’

Caroline listened. She could have laughed a bitter laugh at her own fond folly. And that fair hopeful dream, as connected with fortune and Thomas Kage, flew abruptly away for ever.

Getting the letter into her possession, she put on her prettiest bonnet, and contrived to quit the house unseen. Something in his manner, when he had asked her to go out with him, imparted to her an almost certain conviction that he wanted to speak of his love : in these matters, there is a language not to be misunderstood ; and Caroline would fain shun the interview. But she did not dare remain long at the Rock, lest he should come in search of her.

This he did. While she and Mr. Canterbury stood together at the stile in close converse, Thomas Kage walked across the field and joined them. Vexed at the inopportune interruption, Mr. Canterbury was rather short with the young barrister, in spite of his real liking for him, and turned back home again after a shake of the hand and a few words.

‘ Why did you not tell me you were going to the Rock, Caroline ? ’ began Mr. Kage, as he assisted her over the stile, and they proceeded onwards. ‘ I would have walked with you.’

In defiance of the warm love that glowed within her, tingling her pulses, flushing her cheeks, Caroline Kage steeled her heart against him. The very effort to do it—the consciousness that it must be done—rendered her manner cold, abrupt, and petulant.

‘That is just why I did not tell you,’ she said.
‘I wanted to go alone.’

‘Will you take my arm?’

‘No, thank you. It’s not the fashion to take arms in this part of the world.’

‘It was, the last time I was down here. Do you remember our moonlight walk over these same paths? And I think you were just now leaning on Mr. Canterbury’s.

‘But he is so very close a friend.’

‘And I am your cousin.’

‘A great many degrees removed,’ she said, with a little nervous laugh.

‘The more the better, Caroline, in one point of view. What a beau he is getting!’

‘Who is?’

‘Old Canterbury. He is ten years younger, to look at, than he was two months ago. What has he been doing to himself?’

‘How came you to pay us a visit to-day, and to come without sending word?’ quickly inquired Caroline, as if anxious to pass by the subject of Mr. Canterbury’s looks.

‘I came to see you, Caroline.’

‘O!’ she slightly said, wishing she had wings and could fly away. ‘I thought you always had business at Aberton. Don’t say any more about it; I would rather not know.’

‘First of all, I wish to tell you some news, Caroline,’ he continued quietly; ‘and then I would ask your advice. I have had a post offered me in India, and I am deliberating whether it will or will not be worth my while to give up the law and accept it. The commencing salary would be seven hundred a-year; the rise, they say, tolerably rapid. In six or seven years from this it might be fifteen hundred—rather more than doubled.’

‘You do not make seven hundred a-year in London?’

‘Nothing like it; I wish I did; there’d be no question then of my leaving it. This year I expect to make about three hundred, all told.’

‘Then I should go to India,’ she said, with animation. ‘You may never have such a chance thrown in your way again. Accept it at once, without hesitation. I should start by the next mail.’

‘Should you? Is that your deliberate advice?’

‘Yes.’

‘I could not go alone, Caroline.’

The moment was coming. She hated it very much, simply because she knew she should be false both to him and herself. Her face took a white hue.

‘If I can—can induce one to go out with me, my loving companion, and share my fortunes, then

I will go. Otherwise, I stay and fight out my fate in England.'

Caroline Kage did not answer. Her manner and face had grown cold as a stone. He resumed, turning on her his good honest eyes, speaking in a low, steady, tender tone.

'A great hope has lain within me for several months now; in fact, since that sojourn at the seaside last year; you and I have met twice since then, and with each time it has grown brighter and surer. I did not speak of it; while my future was so doubtful, it was impossible to do so in honour; neither did I betray it by so much as a look—at least, not willingly; in these cases there lies generally a tacit understanding, arising one knows not how or whence, and I think you have understood me. When this post was first placed at my disposal, my impulse was to reject it. But I considered it well; and I saw that it might present a solution to what seemed a hard fate—prolonged, interminable waiting—if you also could be brought to regard it, with your mother's approbation, in the same light. And so I determined to lay the case before you, and ask you, Caroline, to go out to India with me.'

She was a little agitated, opening her lips to speak and closing them again abruptly. Her colour went and came.

‘I wish you to understand fully, before deciding, Caroline ; not for worlds would I induce you to take a step that might result afterwards in disappointment. Therefore try and realise what I am about to say. You have, I presume, some notion of the relative value of money—of what seven hundred a-year may imply, as to ways and means. Your mother’s income is, I believe, just five hundred per annum ; mine will be seven ; but then money goes less far in India than at home. I should start with a few hundreds in hand, and my salary will have a yearly increase. We should have quite enough for comfort, a little for moderate luxury.’

He paused, but received no answer.

‘Would the companion venture with me ?’

‘No,’ she answered. And her tone was low and cold. ‘No.’

A change, like a blight, passed over his features. ‘Think again, Caroline,’ he said, after a pause. ‘Reflect upon it, and give me an answer later in the day.’

‘There is no necessity. I should only say what I do now—no.’

In perfect silence they walked on some yards. Caroline suddenly quickened her pace as though she would have quitted him. He put out his hand to stop her.

‘Caroline, have you fully understood me?’

‘I imagine so; I am quite sure so. Quite fully.’

‘And you reject me?’

‘Don’t be silly. Reject! Well, then,—yes; if you will have an answer. Cousins we are, and cousins we must remain; nothing more.’

‘I have waited long to say this; I could not speak without some such justification as that which now offers. You have misled me, Caroline.’

‘What will you say next? If there has been any misleading in the matter, it must have been in your fancy.’

‘You have misled me, and you know it,’ he reiterated, too earnest to heed the signs of his own agitation. ‘You have been misleading me all along.’

‘Tom, I have not. I dread poverty, and should never marry to encounter it, so how could I mislead you? Don’t make a spectacle of yourself; I hate scenes, especially in an open field.’

‘I am not one to make a spectacle of myself,’ he rejoined, with sufficient calmness, ‘but—I must repeat it—you have *cruelly* misled me. Do you forget that when I was last here, you—’

‘Yes, I forget all about it, and I don’t wish to remember,’ she heartlessly interrupted. ‘Why,

I'd rather be turned into that glove of yours than wed myself to poverty.'

'Do you call the income I have described poverty?'

'Of course I do; dreadful poverty to marry upon. Where's the good of marrying at all, if you are to be no better off than before? Seven hundred a-year, indeed! it would not half keep me in dress.'

'Upon what income, then, would you marry?'

'Upon as many thousands. Not a fraction under.'

Partly from the agitation that the moment brought to her, so that she scarcely knew what she said or did, partly because she felt herself in a dilemma, which half-frightened her, her manner and words were alike repellent, while her heart was silently beating with its love. But for a golden vista already dazzling her worldly eyes, Caroline Kage might have been true to love and herself, and gone out with him. That she *had* led him to hope in a manner unmistakable, that she was using him miserably ill, her mind was as conscious of as his. Thomas Kage struggled to be his own calm self, and if his countenance betrayed its sense of wrong, he did not speak it; and thus walking side by side in silence, each with a bursting heart, they reached the gate. Caroline would have passed in hurriedly.

‘ Surely you will not leave me thus !’ he said, with emotion. ‘ Do you know what you are doing for me ?—that my life henceforth will be a blighted one ?’

‘ I am very sorry ; I hope you will soon forget me, Tom,’ she answered, her voice a little softening. ‘ The sooner the better.’

‘ What if I were to tell you that you are heartless ?’

Heartless she certainly was not, in respect to having loved him. But she knew the safer plan now was to appear so.

‘ I cannot help it if you do. You should never have thought of me or come near me, knowing your prospects were what they are. How was I to know ?’

‘ Then it is not *me* you would reject, but my want of sufficient income ? Let me lay the case before Mrs. Kage, and see if she considers it an insuperable bar.’

‘ I would advise you not. It would be waste of time. Knowing my mother as you do, you must be aware that, far from persuading me to marry upon a small income, she would be the first to stop me. That is not to the purpose, however : were she even to urge me to accept you for my husband, I should answer her as I have answered you—I will not.’

‘So, hope is to go out for me thus ; now, and for evermore !’

‘Hope never ought to have existed. Unless you could offer me a suitable home, with carriages and court-dresses and opera-boxes and all that, you might have had better sense than to think of me. Thomas, I cannot help saying it.’

‘Does happiness lie in court-dresses and opera-boxes, think you, Caroline?’ he sadly asked, his pale face made paler by the contrast of the green laurels.

‘Yes, of course. I cannot do without them. What is more, I shall never be induced to try.’

‘O Caroline, my love, let me pray of you not to deceive yourself. I speak for your own sake. These things, unless your heart can be with him who gives them, will turn out but mocking shadows.’

‘Never ; for me. I was born to pomp and state on my mother’s side, as you know. Though they have not been mine yet, I shall not love them less when they come.’

‘God forgive you, Caroline, for playing me false. You *know* how you have led me on from the first, and what your manner has been to me. The sunshine of my life goes out with you.’

‘Nonsense !’

‘That you may never repent this day is my

earnest wish ; but I cannot help saying that you will, in all probability, live to recall it with pain. A woman cannot heartlessly jilt a man, as you are about to jilt me, without its pressing sometimes unpleasantly on her memory. I will try and bear in silence, wishing you no ill-will, rather praying ever that God shall bless you.'

She ran indoors for safety, her eyes filling with tears as she went, in manner repellent to the last. It was well to go : had she stayed another moment, she might have fallen on his bosom in repentance. Thomas Kage looked after her with yearning eyes. It had been the turning-point in his life ; the turn which so many must pass and survive : all green behind, bright hopeful green, as a meadow in spring ; all gray henceforward, a dull, cheerless, leaden gray. One word of his had been apt : if ever man was jilted in this world, he had been by Caroline Kage.

Luncheon was on the table when he entered, and Mrs. Kage in the fidgets. She would willingly have chained him by the leg, rather than that he should be lingering in the verdant fields, in the sweet summer air, with Caroline.

That young lady, gone upstairs to take off her bonnet, came down with a serene, unconscious face. Mrs. Kage approached the table, and put her eyeglass up.

‘Cold lamb!’ she said. ‘Will you save me the trouble of carving, Thomas? And mind you make a good luncheon: it must be millions of hours since you breakfasted.’

He did as he was told: carved; and made a good luncheon, or appeared to do so: Mrs. Kage was not one to take much notice, and Caroline seemed occupied with her own plate. The conversation turned on general subjects, partly upon Mrs. Garston, upon Sarah Annesley and her new home in London; but not a word did he say further of himself or his affairs. When the tray was removed, and Mrs. Kage had resumed her sofa, her fan, and her essence-bottles, he approached her to say farewell.

‘Are you going now?’ cried Mrs. Kage.

‘I must, indeed.’

‘I understood you to say that you might stay for dinner.’

He had said something of the sort—anticipating a different answer from Caroline. The night train had brought him down; the next night train he had intended should convey him back. He would take the first that started now.

‘I am anxious to get back to town: this is a busy time at Westminster. And now that I have seen you and Caroline—’

He did not finish his sentence—if it had any

finish. A shake of Mrs. Kage's delicate hand, faded like her face, and then he turned to Caroline.

‘Am I to say farewell?’

So he had not given up hope, even then? The low tone was full of meaning, the eyes went questioningly out into the depths of hers.

Only for a moment. She turned them away with a hard coldness, and put out her hand with a grudging air.

‘Good-bye, Thomas. I wish you a pleasant journey.’

Was it said in mockery? No, but he verily thought it. The front door closed after him, and next the gate between the laurels.

‘There never was any comprehending him,’ said Mrs. Kage, languidly refreshing her face with eau-de-Cologne. ‘Fancy his coming all that immense distance, and travelling all night, to stay but an hour!’

How long Caroline remained motionless at the window, straining her eyes on the gate Mr. Kage had passed through, she heeded not. If the sunshine, as he said, had gone out of his heart, very bitterly conscious was she that it had equally gone out of hers. In his departure, in the miserable certainty that he and she were finally divided for ever, there came a revulsion of feeling. Perhaps for a few moments Caroline saw things in their

true colours, shorn of fancy, and discerned the superiority and the worth of the man she had thrown away. But for its utter fruitlessness, she might have stretched out her repentant arms with the cry that had once before broken from her lips: 'O my love, my love, come back to me!'

'Have you lost your hearing, Caroline?' demanded Mrs. Kage. 'I ask you what could have brought the young man down on this flying visit? He confessed he had no business at Aberton this time.'

The direct questions recalled Caroline to existing things. She roused herself, but did not answer.

'He certainly said at first he should be happy to remain to dinner,' pursued Mrs. Kage. 'Not that I wanted him to, I'm sure. It is quite disagreeable to possess a sixteenth cousin, unhappily of the same name, who takes the liberty of popping in upon you at all hours and seasons—this is the third time he has come. But, having come, why has he gone flying back again in so vast a hurry?'

'I believe it is through me that he has gone,' said Caroline in a low tone, for she wished to make a clean breast of it, and of something else besides. 'I offended him, and it sent him away.'

'How was that?' asked Mrs. Kage, putting on that indifferent drawl in which she was an adept.

‘Adjust this cushion at my feet, will you, Caroline?’

‘He has had a place in India offered to him,’ said Caroline, sinking her voice and disregarding the cushion. ‘He said he would accept it if I would go out with him.’

‘What is the value of it?’ eagerly responded Mrs. Kage, as she leaned forward, forgetting her languor in glowing mists of lakhs upon lakhs of rupees.

‘Seven hundred a-year.’

Mrs. Kage fell back again. ‘O!’

‘Seven hundred to begin with, and rising year by year up to fifteen. He thought it right to warn me that money does not go far in India.’

‘Well?’ said Mrs. Kage sharply, in the pause come to by Caroline.

‘I ridiculed it, mamma.’

‘What else should you do, child? That’s well. I always thought Thomas Kage a fool; he has just proved himself one.’

Caroline took up a ball of cotton and tossed it gently and dreamily, as though her thoughts were far away. Mrs. Kage drew her white shawl over her shoulders, and resumed.

‘Did you see Mr. Canterbury this morning?’

‘Yes; and left the letter with him. He will come in about it by and by.’

Mrs. Kage began unscrewing the stopper of

her smelling-salts, an obstinate stopper, given to stick in, and made no remark.

‘He joined me as I was leaving, and walked with me through the park,’ continued Caroline, breaking the pause.

Mrs. Kage had heard this so often that she was getting a little irritated. For the life of her she could not tell whether Mr. Canterbury meant anything by these attentions or whether he did not.

‘All shilly-shallying, Caroline. Mr. Canterbury ought to speak to you.’

‘He has spoken. As we stood at the stile that divides the park from the field, one word led to another, I suppose, and he asked me to be Mrs. Canterbury.’

The young lady spoke with listless apathy; but not with apathy was the intelligence received. The Honourable Mrs. Kage could be roused sometimes, though it took a good deal to do it.

‘You lucky girl! To be provided for in this splendid manner at eighteen. How delightful!’

‘Does it bode good-luck or ill-luck to receive two offers of marriage in one morning?’ dreamily wondered Caroline.

‘Ill-luck!’ screamed Mrs. Kage. ‘Ill-luck to be made the mistress of a splendid place like the Rock!—of unlimited wealth!—of jewels and dia-

monds ! You happy child ! You will be the envy of the world.'

'Well, I don't know, mamma,' said Caroline ; and her tone certainly did not tell of happiness. 'I had not used to care so much for those things until you talked me into it. Of course a fine establishment is desirable, and money and jewels are desirable ; but—I can't tell.'

'Desirable !' broke in Mrs. Kage ; 'money is the only desirable thing in life ; I know it to my cost. I was a simpleton, and married for love : married one who had nothing but his face and his figure and his scarlet regimentals ; I, a peer's daughter. He was a perfect Adonis, to be sure—and you, dear, are the very image of him, as I continually tell you—but one can't live upon beauty. And what were the wretched, miserable, lasting consequences ? Why, that I sunk down to the level of an obscure officer's wife—and widow—and was obliged to eke out my paltry bit of money as I best could, and am neglected and forgotten by those of my own rank. I have told your papa many a time that he had better have buried me alive than run away with me : and so he had.'

'Still, money is not everything, mamma ; no, nor jewels either ; and I do not know whether they will compensate for the drawbacks of an old

husband who has old children. I wish I did know.'

'Yes, they will, Caroline,' said Mrs. Kage, leaning on her elbow, and sniffing at her vinaigrette. '*Believe me.* It is woman's destiny, unhappily, to grow up, and be married; and of course she can't go aside from it. And if she could, she wouldn't. Girls have exalted notions, you see, as to a married life; implanted in them at their birth, I think, by some spirit of contrarieness, for I'm sure I don't know how else they come. To their notion, it seems a sort of celestial Paradise, and all they think of is, how to get in; never reflecting that, once in, there's no getting out—'

'There it is, mamma.'

'Let me finish. I say, child, it is a woman's destiny to be married, just as it is a stray sheep's to be put into the pound; but I do assure you that it is not of the very slightest consequence what the husband may be: youth or age, beauty or deformity, stocked with intellect or devoid of brains; it is all one, provided he has a deep purse. This is the one only thing to look at. Suppose I had had a heap of children,' logically proceeded Mrs. Kage, 'where should I have been! Why, in the workhouse; worse off than any poor stray lamb in the pound.'

Caroline leaned from the window, and plucked a piece of clematis. Her mother resumed :

‘I repeat, that a marriage for love is the most miserable fate on earth, where a good income does not accompany it. I married for love myself, and I ought to know. Your dear papa said I worried him into his grave with my complaints; but one may just as well be in the grave as out of it, where the money is lacking. As to love, it is the most wearisome Darby-and-Joan kind of thing you can imagine, enough to give one the cold shivers.’

‘He wears a wig,’ grumbled Caroline, reverting to her own grievances, as they ran one after another through her mind.

‘The most enchanting wig I ever saw, dear : no living soul could tell that it’s not growing hair. It is so beautifully blended with his own—of which he has a full crop behind—that a French coiffeur, with all his artistic skill, could not tell where the hair ends and the wig begins.’

‘But it *is* a wig,’ argued Caroline.

‘Whether it’s a wig, or whether it is not, it will not add to, or take from, domestic felicity.’

Caroline Kage raised her eyebrows. ‘Domestic felicity, and old Father Canterbury!’ irreverently thought she. Involuntarily, another form

rose to her mind, in connection with that word; one she had just watched out of sight.

‘Does he take it off at night?’

‘Take off what?’ asked Mrs. Kage, in momentary forgetfulness of their subject.

‘The wig,’ irritably explained Caroline. ‘If he does, and I see his bald head, I shall scream frightfully.’

‘My dear child, let your thoughts centre upon the enormous wealth that will be yours, not upon a perishable wig,’ said Mrs. Kage, refreshing her face again.

‘I wish I knew; I wish I knew,’ murmured Caroline in a low tone: but her mother caught the words.

‘Knew what?’

‘Whether it will be for good or for ill.’

Could it have been, that her guardian angel was, even then, warning her from this marriage? A very powerful instinct against it had arisen in her heart. Caroline hid her eyes in her hands, and strove to see what she had best do—it was not yet too late. Had she been in the habit of seeking for a Guidance that cannot fail, she would have sought it then; but she never had been. The Honourable Mrs. Kage had taught her how to enter a ballroom gracefully, had shown her how to win, by deception if need were, the favour

of desirable men ; but that other kind of tuition had been utterly passed over. Poor Caroline !

Mrs. Kage looked at her with a kind of hungry keenness, scarcely assured yet ; and sprinkled half-a-dozen essences abroad at once.

‘ Was he all rapture, dear ? ’

‘ Who ? ’ cried Caroline, starting from her reverie, and a burning blush diffused itself over her face.

‘ Mr. Canterbury. ’

‘ O ! ’ was the slighting comment, for the question had certainly borne another reference in her mind. ‘ Why should Mr. Canterbury be in a rapture ? ’

‘ When you accepted him, dearest. ’

‘ I did not accept him. ’

Mrs. Kage half raised herself, looked at Caroline with open mouth, and then fell back in a flood of tears, bemoaning her hard fate, and her daughter’s folly in having rejected the Rock. She had already been anticipating a large share of its magnificent comforts.

‘ A mansion fit for a king ; carriages at command ; servants in numbers ; luxurious pineries, and hothouses, and conservatories ; wines from every part of the known world ; delicacies served on silver and gold ; and a banker’s book that has no end !—O Caroline ! ’

Caroline pushed off her hair in a heat, and looked rather defiant. This upset Mrs. Kage.

‘She’s a regular chip of the old block!’ cried that lady, going into a frightful passion. ‘Her father was one of the fools of the world, and she takes after him. I’ve said so twenty times. Go after that miserable Tom Kage, you ungrateful girl! Be off to India with him! Live in barracks, or starve! what shall I care?’

‘There is no necessity to put yourself out, mamma,’ coolly spoke Caroline.

‘The purple and fine linen she might have indulged in!—the opera-boxes and Richmond fêtes!—the delights of a London season—the presentation at Court in feathers and pearls. And to give it all up for Thomas Kage, the low-born!’

‘I said that I had rejected Mr. Kage.’

‘You said as well that you had rejected Mr. Canterbury. Yah! How dare you answer me?’

‘No, I did not,’ calmly went on Caroline. ‘I said I had not accepted Mr. Canterbury. I suppose I should have done so had there been time; but Thomas Kage came up at the moment while I was hesitating. We were standing with our backs this way, and never saw him until he was close.’

Away went Mrs. Kage’s sobs. ‘Dearest, darling child, why did you not say so at first? My own love! you *will* accept him?’

Caroline knitted her brows. 'I suppose so. I don't know what else to do.'

'I will accept him for you to-night, my dear, and tell him how happy you are to be his wife. My poor nerves!'

'If I could only foresee a little into the future!' exclaimed Caroline, her face gloomy, her tone miserably doubtful. Mrs. Kage glanced at her stealthily, as she threw some sweet odours about.

'My sweet dove! I am sure you *did* like the notion of this grand good fortune. I could not have been mistaken.'

'Yes, in one sense,' answered Caroline, inwardly conscious that she had done her share towards leading Mr. Canterbury on. 'But a strange foreboding that it will not bring me happiness is upon me, now that the moment for decision has come.'

'I am delighted to hear it, dear;' and Mrs. Kage had reassumed all her affected languor. 'De-lighted. Things all turn out and go by contrary. When I had given your poor papa the promise to have him, in spite of everybody—and an idiot he was for asking it, knowing what his paltry income was—I was all in a glow of rapturous anticipation. *My* marriage resulted in disappointment; *yours* will bring everything that's good. I foresee it, dear.'

‘If I do have Mr. Canterbury, I should like to be master and mistress.’

‘O, to be sure, sweetest. He is excessively good-natured, and your wishes will be his. I should have liked to see your dead papa attempt to contradict mine!’

‘I don’t allude to *him*. Of course I shall do all I like, as far as he goes. I spoke of the Miss Canterburys. Suppose Olive should try to domineer over me? I would not stand it.’

The notion of Olive Canterbury’s attempting to domineer over her father’s wife so tickled Mrs. Kage, that she laughed till she upset her choicest essence-bottle.

‘To think of the inexperienced goose you are, dear Caroline! You will be simply a queen, and exercise a queen’s will. As to Mr. Canterbury’s daughters, *I* will take care, once you are installed at the Rock, that another home is found for them.’

‘Mamma!’ exclaimed Caroline, half-startled at the semi-promise.

‘Yes, yes, dear, it will be all right; rely upon me. My respected father, Lord Gunse, always said what a talent I had for diplomacy.’

And the Lord Gunse’s honourable daughter fell back in easy complacency on her sofa, and gathered up the fallen essence-bottle.

Scarcely knowing, certainly not heeding, which way he took, Thomas Kage, leaving the house and his hopes behind him, had turned into the narrow privet-walk. The sun shone still on the world, but for him it seemed to have set for ever. Only those who have passed through the ordeal, can tell what that awful moment of awaking was to him. The heart had had its best life crushed out of it; it had been withered with the cruel blow.

Winding round between the close hedges, when he was halfway through the confined walk he came face to face with Millicent Canterbury. So entirely was he buried in the moment's anguish, that at first he positively did not recognise her. Millicent stopped, half-scared; scared at what she saw on his countenance.

A few hurried words ensued—an apology for not being able to call at the Rock; an intimation that he was hastening away to catch a London train; and Mr. Kage, lifting his hat, passed on, leaving Millicent gazing after him, a wondering surprise on her face, a sense of blank disappointment in her heart.

‘What can be amiss?’ she said aloud. ‘He looks like a man stricken for death.’

CHAPTER X.

COMING HOME.

IN his fine library, its walls lined with valuable books, and its appointments fit for a royal potentate, paced George Canterbury. The light, lingering still in the western sky after the sun went down, cast its soft brightness on the room through the beautiful painted window at the farther end, imparting a red glow to the still handsome face of the room's master, so that he looked heated. Perhaps he was: the day had been sultry; Mr. Canterbury had just dined, and the flush might have been more than surface-heat. Besides, there were other causes; and if the blood coursed on faster than ordinary, it was only natural that it should.

George Canterbury, turned sixty, had made an offer of marriage that day to a young girl of eighteen. He called in at her mother's late in the afternoon to know his fate, and was accepted. So far, it was all very smooth and pleasant; but

he had to make the communication to his daughters, and that was less so. It ought to be done at once, and he was thinking of the words he should use, and exactly what he could say, as he paced there—something after the manner of a schoolboy who cons his lesson.

The shades in the room grew darker, and a servant came in to light the wax-candles; but he found himself stopped. A semi-darkened atmosphere is less embarrassing to make a disagreeable communication in than a broad glare of light; and the master of the Rock was conscious of it.

‘Don’t light up yet, John. Go and say to Miss Canterbury that I wish to see her here.’

Olive came in. A shivering dread lay within her of what she was going to hear; but nothing of it appeared in her manner; she was calm, grand, stately as usual.

‘Do you want me, papa?’

‘Yes. Sit down, Olive.’

Every word that George Canterbury had been rehearsing went clean out of his head. He had never been troubled with nervousness in any shape or form; but it was *not* pleasant to have to tell this good and grand daughter, who was herself turned thirty, and for many years the Rock’s entire mistress, that he was about to bring home a young wife. Olive sat down, implicitly obedi-

ent, and waited. He imparted the news somehow, in rather a lame fashion; and he had less trouble than he expected in being understood. Had he made the communication four-and-twenty hours earlier, Olive Canterbury's utter surprise and shock would have discomposed him; but she had now been warned of it.

Never a word did she utter while he spoke. To any one but her father she would have remonstrated against so unsuitable a scheme, and not spared it condemnation; but to *him*, remembering the duty of a daughter, she remained silent. She could not praise; she would not blame. It was a bitter moment in Olive Canterbury's life.

'Do you fancy, sir, that this can possibly bring satisfaction to yourself?' she asked in a low tone, breaking the painful silence.

'Certainly I do, Olive; there can be no doubt it will.'

'I—I suppose you wish me to understand that the measure is irrevocably fixed upon, not merely one that you contemplate as probable?'

'Of course it is,' answered Mr. Canterbury, in the rather fractious tone that opposition sometimes induces; for of all men living, none bore opposition less well than George Canterbury. His temperament was the most yielding in the world, and to be crossed troubled him. 'Should I have

sent for you to tell you this, Olive, had it not been irrevocably fixed? We shall be married directly.'

There was nothing further to be said then. Olive tried to falter out some words of congratulation, of hope for his future happiness; but they froze on her tongue, and her dry lips refused to speak them. She was glad to escape from the room; Mr. Canterbury was not less glad that she should.

'Well, what were you wanted for?' was the salutation that greeted Miss Canterbury, when she returned to her sisters in the lighted drawing-room; and it was Mrs. Dunn who spoke it. 'What news have you heard?'

'The worst news possible to be heard; the news you prepared us for to-day, Lydia,' was Olive's reply, as she sank into a seat stunned and miserable. 'Caroline Kage is to take my dead mother's place.'

'I told you so,' was Lydia Dunn's answer. And there was actually a kind of complaisant satisfaction in her tone—not at the doubtful blow being true, but at her own clear-sightedness in finding it out.

Jane Canterbury turned her head from the light with a faint moan; Millicent dropped her face upon the table amidst her sewing-silks, and

burst into tears; Mrs. Dunn, on the contrary, advanced full into the rays of the chandelier, and stood, upright, angry, indignant.

‘Do not meet it in this spirit, girls; show your dignity, if you possess any. I presume you held out for your rights, Miss Canterbury?’

‘What rights?’ returned Olive, too utterly prostrated to retain her usual self-possessed good sense.

‘What rights!’ repeated Mrs. Dunn in a taunting tone, for she had no notion of people’s yielding to ill-fortune. ‘Well, that is a pertinent question.’

But Olive could not retort; Mrs. Dunn saw it, and made the best of it.

‘Has it not occurred to you, Olive, that you ought to have an explicit understanding with your father?—that your privileges and your sisters’ liberties and comforts, as daughters of this house, must remain intact, secure from the capricious control of any interloper. Did you say this?’

‘Lydia, I could not say it!’

‘I see I must act for you all,’ said Mrs. Dunn with condescending patronage. ‘I *did* think you were strong-minded, Olive.’

‘So did I,’ said poor Olive, ‘until this came.’

Perhaps Mrs. Dunn—a hard woman by nature—could not understand or realise to herself what a

blow this, their father's marriage, was to the unwedded daughters of the house. She had quitted home and home-ties ; she had her dwelling and her interests away ; her father and the Rock no longer, so to say, belonged to her ; but she was quite ready, in her domineering spirit, to make their cause hers. She thought it was her mission to put the world, including Mr. Canterbury, to rights when it wanted it ; and she liked amazingly the anticipated battle.

The library was lighted when she entered, and George Canterbury sat in his evening spectacles (which had double glasses), calmly reading the county paper. To see his self-asserting daughter Lydia come in, pushing back the door with an air of authority, acted on him as a kind of shock. He had hoped the unpleasantness of the matter was over ; and he had always been rather afraid of positive Lydia.

‘Sir, this is a startling communication you have made to Olive,’ she began, not choosing to hint at any previous suspicions of her own. ‘Can it possibly be true ?’

Mr. Canterbury fidgeted the least in the world, so far as slightly to ruffle the leaves of the journal, and intimated that it was true. Lydia had taken up her station right in front of him, at a few paces’ distance.

‘What is to become of my sisters?’

‘Become of them!’ repeated Mr. Canterbury, holding the paper before his face, as if still perusing it. ‘In what way?’

‘I put myself out of the discussion altogether, having my own home—which I shall very soon return to now,’ continued Mrs. Dunn decisively. ‘But they have no other home to retire to, sir.’

‘They do not require any other.’

‘As soon as you marry, it will be your wife’s home, not theirs.’

‘Absurd!’ repeated Mr. Canterbury. ‘If I chose to bring home four-and-twenty wives, there would be room for your sisters then.’

‘In point of space there might be. But young wives are given to be domineering, and Miss Kage may take a fancy for indulging in it. How, in that case, could they remain at the Rock? There’s no saying, indeed, what extent of putting-upon Jane might bear; but Olive—’

‘This is uncalled for, Lydia,’ interrupted Mr. Canterbury, rising in surprise, and facing his daughter. ‘Miss Kage is of an amiable nature; she and they are on intimate and affectionate terms, as you know. Those terms will be only cemented by a closer union.’

Never had Lydia Dunn a greater mind for anything in her life than to tell her father he was a

fool for thinking so. Looking at him, she wondered whether any remonstrance or reasoning, possible to be urged, could arrest this most unsuitable and wild project; and she decided that it would not. It had not been Lydia, however, if she had kept her tongue quite silent.

‘I beg your pardon, papa—I cannot help speaking. Caroline Kage is so young, that she might be your grand-daughter; if you marry her, you will be the laughing-stock of the whole county.’

George Canterbury felt grievously offended.

‘It is not your place to say these things to me, Lydia. As to Caroline’s age, that is a matter solely for her consideration and mine.’

‘You had a great deal better marry Mrs. Kage.’

‘Thank you,’ he spoke stiffly. ‘I think you have said nearly enough, Lydia.’

Convinced that whatever she said would do no good towards arresting the marriage, Lydia thought perhaps she had. She returned to the subject of her sisters.

‘Will you promise—will you undertake that my sisters’ home shall not be rendered unhappy?—that they shall be as free and independent in it as they have been?’

‘Certainly I will,’ responded Mr. Canterbury. ‘You must have taken up very strange ideas to fear otherwise.’

‘No, sir, the ideas are quite natural. There will probably be two antagonistic powers in the house, once Caroline Kage enters it. Olive has been its mistress hitherto : and her own.’

‘She can be mistress of herself and all else as much as she has been,’ hastily spoke Mr. Canterbury. ‘Except, of course, in the matter of—of housekeeping, and that,’ he added, his thoughts falling on domestic matters. ‘Olive must resign her control over the household.’

‘Olive will not expect to retain it, sir, when you put a wife at its head. I speak of my sisters’ personal interests. Will they be allowed the perfect freedom of action, the comfort, the uncontrolled liberty of themselves and their time, that they have hitherto possessed?’

‘Yes, certainly they will. What should hinder it?’

Mr. Canterbury stared in a little surprise as he put the question. He was by no means a clear-sighted man : the old saying, of not seeing an inch beyond the nose, would have aptly applied to him. He fully believed his daughters would be just as free and happy when Caroline came home as they were now ; and he deemed Lydia most unreasonable to suggest otherwise ; thinking, indeed, that she must be doing it for the sake of cavilling.

‘I will say no more, papa, except to remind you.

that things in similar cases have been known to turn out quite differently from pleasant expectations. I foresee that they may in this ; and I hope, should it be so, you will remember your promise to take care of the comfort and happiness of Olive and her sisters.'

'The girl must be a little off her head to-night,' said George Canterbury to himself, as Lydia went out and left him alone.

'No hope, no redress !' she exclaimed when she returned to her sisters ; and she flung up her hands in temper as she spoke. 'He is going to make an idiot of himself, and won't be stopped in it ; and Caroline Kage will soon be mistress of the Rock.'

The year had grown later ; the brown and red tints of autumn were spreading in the foliage, imparting that wondrous beauty to Nature's landscape that the other seasons lack.

Not in their own pleasant morning-room, but in the great magnificent drawing-room, were gathered the unmarried daughters of George Canterbury. They sat, as may be said, in state, awaiting the return home of the bridegroom and bride after their honeymoon. In state, so far as the room went, but they were at their ordinary occupations. Miss Canterbury and Jane wore silks of a violet hue ; Leta had on a charming pink of some fancy material.

After a few days given to their natural repugnance and grief when the communication was first made to them, to the bitter heartache, than which nothing could be keener, the Miss Canterburys resigned themselves to what they could not prevent, and made the best of matters with outward cheerfulness and grace. Not so Mrs. Dunn. She prided herself upon being independent, upon 'showing what she thought,' and went back to London. Simpering Mrs. Kage, with her own peculiar taste, expressed her wonder to Lydia that she did not remain to 'assist' at her father's wedding. Mrs. Dunn bluntly answered that, of the two, she thought she would rather assist at his funeral.

The marriage took place in August; so, you see, no time was lost. Mrs. Kage never was free from an inward fear that Caroline might retract her consent yet, and hurried it on at least in an equal degree with the fond bridegroom elect. She got up a charming little fable that Thomas Kage had fallen in love with some London lady of fortune, to whom he was about to be united, and repeated it (with a vast many confirmatory details) for the edification of Caroline. But Mrs. Kage need not have feared; Caroline had no thought of retracting. Like a child dazzled by the glitter of a coveted toy, she was eager for it.

Mrs. Kage showed her sense and craft in one

respect—she caused the wedding to be almost a private one. When something was said about who should give the bride away, Mr. Canterbury suggested, as was but natural, her only living relative on the father's side—Thomas Kage. Mrs. Kage did not accept the suggestion; she wrote a pretty note to Mr. Carlton of Chilling Hall, and he undertook the office. The day of the wedding was kept private, the hour fixed for it was the early one of nine in the morning, and the church had no spectators. The Miss Canterburys countenanced it by their presence; Millicent was bridesmaid; Mr. Rufort, the new rector, performed the ceremony. There was a simple breakfast at Mrs. Kage's to which all sat down except the two elder Miss Canterburys, who drove straight home from church; and then the happy pair, as announced by the local newspapers in newspaper phraseology, started on their tour for the Lakes, to enjoy the honeymoon.

It was October now. The honeymoon was over, and a good long honeymoon it had been; and it was to be hoped they *had* enjoyed it. The 'happy pair' were expected home to-day after their six weeks' absence. Everything was in readiness to receive them. The Miss Canterburys, knowing that all was complete and in order, sat in the state drawing-room, quietly pursuing their ordinary occupations. Like right-minded

ladies as they were, they were prepared to render due honour and deference to their father's wife.

But, as Judith, one of the housemaids at the Rock, remarked to a helpmate, it was 'hard lines' for them. No doubt of that; a great deal of heart-schooling discipline was requisite still.

'Leta, how you keep getting up! Your drawing will not be the better for it.'

'I can't help it, Olive. Things seem to be so strange that it makes me restless. Suppose I should forget myself, and call her Carry!'

'What are we to call her?' suddenly wondered Jane. 'It never occurred to me.'

'Mrs. Canterbury, when speaking of her,' said Olive.

'But when speaking to her?'

'I don't know. Nothing. It would be rather ridiculous to say "Mamma,"'—and Olive's fine face took a momentary tinge of mockery—'and equally out of place to call her "Caroline." There is only "Mrs. Canterbury" to fall back upon.'

'Did you recollect to order mamma's portrait to be taken out of their rooms, Olive?' asked Leta.

'My dear, I have recollected everything. It is removed to mine; and Edgar's is also. Mrs. Canterbury will find all things as they should be. Listen! I really believe Neel is bringing in a visitor!'

Olive was right. The butler, speaking with some one as he advanced, threw open the door, and made the announcement :

‘Mrs. Kage.’

‘What an oppressive day for October!’ languidly spoke Mrs. Kage, as she sank on the nearest sofa. ‘My dears, how are you? Do place me a screen, Millicent; your fire is like a volcano.’

She took off her bonnet and cloak; and, pushing back her shawl of black lace, left her dress displayed. By which dress they saw she had come intending to remain for dinner.

‘A lovely day, though, although it is close: quite a good omen for the return of the travellers. My dears, I heard from your mamma this morning.’

Olive bit her lip, partly in amusement. Your mamma! And Caroline more than half-a-score years younger than herself.

‘We have heard also, Mrs. Kage. My father wrote. They will be at home this evening to dinner.’

‘Yes, that is what I came up about, for one thing; all the morning I had a nervous headache, or should have been here earlier. I must see to the arrangements.’

‘What arrangements?’ inquired Olive in surprise.

‘My daughter’s rooms, and so forth.’

‘The arrangements are made: the rooms are in readiness,’ returned Olive.

‘My dearest Miss Canterbury, you have no doubt done to the best of your ability, but a mother’s eye can alone tell what will please her daughter.’

Olive drew herself up. ‘I trust the arrangements will please Mrs. Canterbury. I should like her to see that we have cared for her comfort. Should she wish any alteration made in the rooms, she can give her own orders when she sees them.’

‘Thank you, my dear; I will presently go through them, if you please, with one of the housemaids,’ rejoined Mrs. Kage, whose tone, drawling as it was, bespoke quiet resolution. ‘And now about dinner? what have you ordered?’

Miss Canterbury was silent, from sheer amazement.

‘Can I see the housekeeper?’

‘Mrs. Kage!’ uttered the astounded Olive, ‘I do not understand this. The dinner was fixed upon some hours ago. It will prove satisfactory to Mrs. Canterbury, I have no doubt.’

‘I know what my dear pet likes; and she has begged me, in her letter, to take care that things are comfortable for her.’

‘As I trust they will be found,’ said the indignant Olive, whilst Jane stole out of the room, and Millicent bent over her cardboard with a heightened colour. ‘Should there be any particular dish you wish added to the dinner, I will ascertain whether it can be done.’

‘I will see the housekeeper myself, dear,’ persisted Mrs. Kage, in the most gently-polite tone imaginable, ‘and direct the alterations I may think necessary.’

A flash of Olive’s imperious temper broke out. She rose from her seat, not, however, lifting her voice to anger, though it was unmistakably firm.

‘I have been mistress of the house for many years, Mrs. Kage, and I believe I have been found capable of conducting it. So long as I remain so—which will only be until the coming home of Mrs. Canterbury—I am in no need of assistance, and cannot permit interference. The dinner must be served this evening as I have ordered it.’

‘But you are shockingly rude, my dear, in saying this to my face: quite ill-bred.’

‘I think not. I do not wish to be.’

‘I am Mrs. Canterbury’s mother.’

‘I do not forget it. As soon as Mrs. Canterbury enters the house, I give up all authority to her; until she does, I cannot yield the smallest portion of it, even to you. Forgive me for saying

I am exceedingly surprised that you should wish it.'

'Well, my dear Miss Canterbury, in showing this obstinacy in regard to your new mother, I can but think you stand in the light of your own interests. However, let it pass; as you say, you have but an hour of further power; it does not much matter for that short time.'

Olive clenched her hand on the beautiful table-cover, keeping down her passion; Millicent's brow burnt as she turned it—and could not help the look it bore—on Mrs. Kage. That lady glided off the sofa.

'And now, dears, you will ring for the upper housemaid. I will visit the rooms and see what changes may be expedient.'

'No!' spoke Olive, her temper flashing out at last. 'The rooms shall remain as they are, Mrs. Kage, until your daughter enters into possession of them.'

Olive meant what she said, and Mrs. Kage saw it. All in a minute a doubt crossed that honourable lady whether her policy had been a safe one. So intensely afraid had she been, ever since the marriage, that perhaps her own influence at the Rock might not be what she fully purposed it should be, or that her daughter might find her sway curbed by the imperious and powerfully-

willed Miss Canterbury, that she had come to the resolution of taking the bull by the horns and bringing her authority to bear before its time. A sentence in Mrs. Canterbury's letter, hoping things would be made comfortable for her, and that her mamma must see they were—though it is more than probable the writer had not exactly meant in the way of beds and tables, and dishes for dinner—had afforded Mrs. Kage the plea for coming up as she did. But had she been quite wise in doing so? In the doubt of it that came crossing her, she deemed it well to veer suddenly round to sweetness, and so disarm hostilities.

‘Pray forgive me, my darling Miss Canterbury. It is quite an anomalous position that my poor child will be placed in, and I was so anxious to spare you trouble. If you do not feel the different arrangements as a worry, why, of course, I should not have wished to interfere. Caroline has a charming temper, I assure you, and I feel certain you will all be very happy together.’

‘I desire nothing better than that we should, Mrs. Kage,’ coldly spoke Miss Canterbury.

Mrs. Kage, amiably sweet, sank back on the sofa, after requesting that one of the lady's-maids might be called to carry away her things. Placing her fan and her various bottles on a small stand beside her, for she never went out without them,

she flung some scent about and grew confidential.

‘Of course, my dears, you are women of the world. At least, *you* are, my good Miss Canterbury; necessarily so from your age and position. Therefore I may speak without hesitation all the thoughts of my heart. To marry a man of Mr. Canterbury’s years was a great sacrifice for a beautiful girl of eighteen. It is of no good mincing the fact; some things are as palpable as that much-talked-of problem in Euclid about the ass and the bridge, which my father, the Lord Gunse, was given to quote. But I am quite sure Caroline did not look upon the marriage in that light; she did not see it as a sacrifice, for she was in love with your father.’

Olive made no reply. She began counting the stitches in her netting.

‘Adored him, I may say,’ resumed Mrs. Kage, improving upon her tissue of falsehoods. ‘A-dored him. I saw it from nearly the first. Of course I naturally thought she would be averse to such an offer—might probably not listen to it. “Now, my darling,” I said to her one day, “there cannot be the smallest doubt what good Mr. Canterbury’s intentions are; but let me implore of you, *don’t* allow any thoughts of his wealth to influence you; *dis*-courage him if you do not like

him." "Dearest mother," the innocent lamb responded, "it's not his wealth that will influence me, but himself; I *love* Mr. Canterbury." And so, when I hear the impertinent world say that my daughter's was nothing but a marriage of interest—and that delightful old maid, Mr. Carlton's sister, said it to my face only yesterday—the remembrance of that outspoken avowal of Caroline's acts on my mind like a balm of comfort.'

'I think your daughter could not have been quite indifferent to my father's wealth,' said Olive, wishing the balm extended also to Mrs. Kage's tongue. But she did not wait to prolong the conversation; she left the room on the plea of seeing after Jane, leaving Leta as hostess.

'Ah, my dear, your sister would not say it if she knew all,' said Mrs. Kage to Leta. 'Caroline had the most magnificent prospect offered to her of going out to be a nabob's wife in India. And *he* was a young man.'

'Indeed!'

'She received both the offers in one day. Your father's first, the other's next. He came miles and miles and miles to make it. "Give up Mr. Canterbury for *him*!" she said indignantly. "No; not though he could offer me all the rupees contained in Bengal." "Quite right, my sweet love," I replied to her; "never let vile gold

sway your best affections." And I say she was right.'

Leta had lifted her head; her colour was going and coming. Was it *possible* that this could be true? Too well she knew who it was that had come 'miles and miles and miles' that past day. Unconsciously she let his name escape her—Thomas Kage.

'Well, yes, it was Thomas Kage, my dear Miss Leta,' confessed the wily lady, a little taken aback at Leta's discernment. 'I don't mind telling you; but you must not talk of it again. He began to love Caroline when we were at Little Bay; *I* was afraid of it; but—ah—some one contrived to throw me off the scent then. As the months went on, *he* went on, loving her all the more passionately; and as soon as he thought he could marry, through this Indian appointment being offered him, he came down to ask her to go out. Of course she said "No," Mr. Canterbury being in the way, for whom she had learnt to care, you see, Miss Leta; and Tom Kage went away with a broken heart. *I* saw that.'

A distant sound of carriage-wheels was an excuse for Millicent's running to the window. Her face had turned white and cold as snow in winter.

Things that had appeared strange to her be-

fore were become suddenly clear. It was Caroline Kage he had loved ; it was Caroline his visits had been intended for, not her ; and Caroline—O, it flashed upon her all too surely—had only been fooling her in prating of his love. She—Caroline herself—had loved him ; and Millicent felt half sick at the thoughts instinct revealed to her. Too well she comprehended now the look, as of death, on Thomas Kage's face, when they met in the privet-walk ; he had then been given up for the wealthy master of the Rock. Just as the bitterness of awaking had been his then, so was it now Millicent Canterbury's.

The sound of wheels drew nearer ; the carriage came in view, its four horses prancing gaily up the park. It contained the gay bride and bridegroom ; and Leta in the stir escaped to her chamber.

Caroline was looking charming, charming as a summer rose, as Mr. Canterbury handed her out of the carriage, and came in with her on his proud arm. Whatever the young wife had found the honeymoon, dull or spiritless, tame or more than a little wearying, *he* had thought it rapture. She was gay enough now in meeting them ; she kissed her mother, she kissed Olive, she kissed Jane ; she asked Neel how his wrist was (for the man had had a rather serious accident to it just

before the wedding); she nodded to John; she won, in fact, all hearts.

‘But where’s Leta?’

Ah, where was Leta? Miss Canterbury thought Leta had been in the drawing-room to the last moment; Mrs. Kage confirmed it, saying Leta had been the one to announce to her their arrival. Of course it was supposed that Leta would turn-up from somewhere; and the pleased young wife went to her rooms.

She did not see Leta until just before dinner. Mrs. Canterbury was turning out of her boudoir rather swiftly, in the prettiest white-silk dress that young bride ever wore, with an amethyst necklace on her delicate neck, and caught Leta gliding swiftly by. She drew her in.

‘Where have you been, Millicent, that you did not come to welcome me?’

But ere the question could be answered, Mrs. Canterbury obtained a better view of the face partially turned from her. A white cold face, more like a face of terror than aught else; certainly one that had a great deal of despair in it.

‘Millicent, what is the matter?’

Never did there exist a more straightforward, open-natured girl than Millicent Canterbury. One single moment of inward battle with those feelings that seemed as if they had been outraged, in-

sulted, deceived; and then she answered, looking full at the surprised questioner.

‘Mrs. Canterbury, I have been thinking in my room whether to speak to you, or—or to bury it all for ever,’ said poor Millicent in a still tone, with pauses occasioned by her laboured breath. ‘This minute alone with you has decided it. You did me a great wrong: why, when we were at Little Bay, and after it—for months after it—why did you feed me with the fable that he was in love with me?—he, Thomas Kage?’

A burning rush of colour, fading away into a ghastly whiteness; a trembling, terrified, glittering stare in the beautiful violet-blue eyes: but Mrs. Canterbury gave no other answer.

‘It was *you* he loved,’ continued Millicent. ‘He thought no more of me than of the idle wind that passes. You knew it all. Why did you deceive me? Only this day—an hour ago—have my eyes been opened. What had I done that you should have played upon me so cruel a joke?’

‘I don’t know what it is you are talking of,’ said Mrs. Canterbury, finding her tongue and her self-possession together. ‘I remember nothing about Thomas Kage, or you, or Little Bay. For goodness’ sake don’t attack me unnecessarily, Leta.’

But the tone had a hard, shrill, hysterical ring in it, proving how powerfully the accusation had told upon her ; and she went back into her chamber and shut the door abruptly, leaving Millicent standing there in her bitter pain.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE EVENING PAPER.

THOMAS KAGE sat in his chambers in the Temple. It was a bright afternoon in August (for the exigencies of the story require us to go back for some weeks), passing rapidly on to evening. All the world had gone out of London except Mr. Kage: he could not well afford a holiday, and said to himself that he did not want one.

Seated at his table in the inner room, whose window overlooked the Temple Garden, and the river winding past it, he was busy perusing some papers. The business that had taken him to Aberton early in the spring, and to which an interruption occurred, was again going on. It was not entirely connected with his profession as a barrister, but was a matter he had taken in hand privately to help a friend. The law-courts were up, Thomas Kage had little to do publicly, and so was at liberty to give his time to this.

He sat with his head leaning on his hand,

thinking that very shortly he would have to go to Aberton again, unless his friend, Mr. Rashburn, came up to London. He did not care to go to Aberton; but if he had to go, should he, or should he not, walk over to Chilling, and see her who had played that havoc with his heart?

The traces of the conflict he had gone through since that fatal June day, only two months past, but to him seeming like an age, might be seen in his countenance. The cheeks were even thinner than before, the eyes wore a feverish light, the voice had an habitually-subdued tone of sadness in it; signs that an accurate observer may sometimes note in one who has gone through an ordeal of silent mental suffering. Perhaps it was not well—well for his resolve of forgetting her—that ever and anon some foolish thought or proverb, such as, While there's life there's hope, should dart into his mind, and leave a faint ray of what looked very like hope behind it. While she remained Caroline Kage, and unappropriated; while there existed a chance—and the world is full of such chances—that he should work on to riches, it seemed not absolutely impossible that brightness might succeed to the darkness.

Passionately though he had loved her, perfect as he thought her, he had not failed to see that she had used him cruelly ill; and he had come up

to town that June day calling her heartless. He rejected the offer of going to India; he set himself a task—to forget her. But as the weeks went on, and the pain, ever racking his breast, became a trifle less keen, or perhaps it was only that he grew more inured to it, she resumed some of her old ascendancy over him, and he began to find excuses for her. *She* had not rejected him; at least, not of her own free will; her mother must have forced her to it. And so, if he had to go to Aber-ton, it might be a question whether he should not go on to Chilling; he was beginning to yearn for another sight of her as few men have yearned for anything in this life. One fact he was very certain of: he knew he could not be mistaken in that—she had loved him passionately, with all her heart. It might be—well, yes, it might—that she was suffering as he suffered; and that to see him once more would bring happiness to her as it would to him.

He looked up at the bright ray of sun slanting past the window, but not touching it; and somewhat of the same brightness illumined his spirit.

The London clocks chimed out an evening chime, and Thomas Kage was working on. The boy came in: one he shared with two more barristers, both of whom had gone on the wing, so Mr. Kage could have the whole of him.

‘It’s the paper come, sir,’ he said, putting the evening journal on the table.

Mr. Kage nodded.

‘You need not wait, James.’

No need for a second dismissal. The boy said good-evening to his master, and flew off. Mr. Kage, coming to the end of the parchment he had been looking over, thought he had done enough for the day, and put the dry law documents by until the morrow. Taking up the newspaper, he walked to the window, holding it in his hand while he looked out on the busy clamour and noise.

The gardens were alive, so to say. With the rising of the law-courts a week back, and the migration of the barristers, leaving the Temple to emptiness and Thomas Carr Kage, the large gardens had been simultaneously opened for a couple of hours about sunset to the poor little riff-raff children of London. From the reeking courts, within a stone’s throw, they came; from the miserable haunts, lying nearly contiguous to St. Clement Danes’ fine church; from the Seven Dials and St. Giles’s; from the unwholesome stacks of buildings on the Surrey side, and near the river: on, on they trooped, these ill-fated children, making for the pleasant grass-green place in sure and swift bands, something like that great army of bearing-on locusts, that are not to be turned aside

by man, so powerfully described in the prophecies of Joel. They had not long been let in ; a fine crowd of them : boys and girls, and toddling wee things and babies : scarcely a whole garment or good shoe amongst them—only rags and tatters and dirt ; and with it all merry shouts and light laughter, just as though they had been the favoured of the land, and slept in cots of down with silken curtains of purple.

How they enjoyed that freedom on the green-sward ; leaping, tumbling, rolling on it ! How careful they were not to injure Mr. Broome's growing chrysanthemums—for they had been warned of the danger *that* might cause to this generously-accorded privilege. But Mr. Kage thought they might have been contented with making half the noise, and felt inclined to stop his ears.

A crowded steamer—City men going homewards—passed up the Thames ; one with not a dozen people on it steamed downwards. Some of the noisy infantile crew below rushed to the garden's edge and shouted cheers after both of them. In clattered the boy again, James ; and his master, who had just opened the paper, turned round.

Mr. James, having lingered on the stairs and landing-places with an acquaintance or two, had been waylaid by the postman. Two letters for T. C. Carr Kage, Esq. On the whole, young

Mr. James had reason to like the master he chiefly served, and did not very much grudge the going back into the rooms to deliver the letters.

But Mr. Kage's eye had been caught by something in the evening journal. He motioned to the table, and the boy left the letters on it.

It was a flaming paragraph, written in the true style of the newspaper-contributor, who seems to like to expend his energies equally in recording fashionable movements and unfashionable murders. *This* was of a 'marriage in high life.' George Canterbury, of the Rock, Chilling, to Caroline, only child of the late Captain Alfred Kage and of the Honourable Mrs. Kage, and granddaughter of the late Right Honourable Augustus Lord Gunse.

There was an account of the lovely bride's charming attire, and of the state in which the happy pair departed for the Lakes, there to pass the honeymoon; but Thomas Kage read it not. After the first few words of announcement, telling the tale, he sat like a man turned into stone; the journal fallen from his hands, his white face lifted.

Very strange to say, not a syllable of the contemplated union had penetrated to London and Thomas Kage. And yet perhaps not so strange, if circumstances are taken into consideration. When Lydia Dunn went back from the Rock full of it,

there lay on her heart a faint hope that even then some fortunate accident might happen to prevent the unseemly wedding; and for once her tongue was still. The Miss Canterburys, in writing to Sarah Annesley, felt ashamed to speak of it; time enough, they thought, when it should actually have taken place. Other people did not know of it; and Mrs. Kage had been cautiously silent throughout. Anyway, it came upon Thomas Kage this evening with a blow. At the first moment he believed it not.

But the account was too elaborate for anything but truth. Smoothing the newspaper, he read it again; all. So it was for Mr. Canterbury, the sexagenarian, he had been rejected! It was for the grandeur and riches of the Rock! Caroline's words—spoken in that last memorable interview—came surging back to him; of the carriages, the court-dresses, the jewels, the grandeur, the thousands and thousands a-year she must gain in marrying, or not marry at all. There could be no doubt that she had been thinking of Mr. Canterbury. The alliance must have been even then arranged. A cold damp moisture overspread his gray face; and he flung up his hands to cover it, shutting out the evening's bright light.

'God forgive her for her heartlessness, and me for my credulity! God help me to bear it!'

Ay! And none knew—none in this world—how much need of help he had; how he was shrinking under this decisive blow.

He could not have told afterwards how long he sat there. Had he been a woman he might have fallen on the ground in utter abandonment, and buried his face from even the very light of heaven. He only sat still as a statue; never moving, scarcely breathing, his head and eyelids alike drooping; looking just as though the blow had struck him physically as well as mentally.

When he roused himself it was with a shiver. The letters waiting on the table caught his eye. The one was from Aberton, concerning the business-matter he was engaged on; from the other, as he opened it, fell two cards, tied together with silver cord—which fashion was not obsolete in Chilling. No need to speculate whose names they bore; and the address was in the characterless, nearly illegible handwriting of Mrs. Kage. ‘Mr. Canterbury.’ ‘Mrs. Canterbury.’ Thomas Kage tore each card in two, and threw the pieces into his waste-paper basket.

Twilight was falling on the earth when he went out. The hum and the noise were no longer heard; the disorderly crew had dispersed, leaving their traces behind them. Numberless scraps of paper lay about; rags from dilapidated frocks;

soles or tops of shoes. As Thomas Kage turned into the garden, a thought came across his mind, in the midst of its confusion, that if the power lay with him he would banish this untidy crew; but the next moment he remembered the boon it was to the poor things, and regretted the thought.

He wandered on by the path to the foot of the garden, and there sat down with his pain. The sunny daylight had turned into a gray evening; the air seemed heavy, the skies were lead-coloured—all a type of his own bruised and weary heart.

The recollection of his last interview with his mother flashed into his mind. ‘Pain, toil, sorrow, whatever trouble may be deemed necessary for you—you will not fail,’ Lady Kage had said. ‘You will bear up bravely, looking to the end.’ And his answer had been that he *would* bear: ‘Yes, God helping me.’

A light in the leaden sky above drew his attention upwards. The thick clouds had parted, giving glimpse of a golden radiance; the young moon showed herself for a moment. It actually seemed a type to Thomas Kage that the help he had wished for was surely there; always waiting for any moment when necessity should call for it. He thought, perhaps fancifully, that his mother might be looking down for him—as she herself had said in dying she should do, and drawn her

comfort from the imaginative picture. Did she see all his heart-sick pain? Could her influence, reminding him of his undertaking to struggle manfully, reach him here? He surely believed it might.

Bending his forehead in his hand, he thought and thought; making good resolves to bear up, and to strive from that moment to put from him resolutely all remembrance of the love that had formed his day-dream. Henceforth, *being helped*, he would be more energetic in all life's duties; bearing his cross in silence, looking not for reward here; and so forget that anything, but working on patiently for the better end, had ever been hoped for.

He rose up then, got out of the solitary garden, and bent his steps westward, disregarding cabs and omnibuses and any other modes of conveyance that might present themselves. When the mind is racked with trouble, walking is the most acceptable. His dinner might be waiting at home, but he could not eat it. Old Dorothy would only have it put away, and think business detained him.

In passing through Paradise-square, for he took the longest way home he could find, he saw Mrs. Dunn's carriage standing at her door. That lady, going abroad to some evening party, came

swiftly out of her house at the same moment, the lappets of her jaunty widow's cap stirring gently behind her.

‘Is it you, Mr. Kage? How are you?’

‘Thank you,’ was all he answered. ‘Are you well?’

‘As well as that disgraceful news from home will allow me to be,’ said Mrs. Dunn tartly, drawing him a few steps farther up on the broad white pavement, that her servants, waiting with the carriage, might not hear the complaint. ‘Yes, Mr. Kage, I repeat the word deliberately—disgraceful.’

‘You allude to—’

‘To my father's marriage,’ she interrupted, speaking what he had hesitated to do. ‘You have heard of it, of course?’

‘Some cards came to me this afternoon.’

‘Cards!’ wrathfully repeated Mrs. Dunn. ‘That woman, the mother, has had the face to send some to me. She'd better have sent a caricature of two fools' heads instead. How long have you known of it, Mr. Kage?’

‘I never had the slightest suspicion that such an event was in contemplation.’

‘That it was possible, you might say. No; there has been craft at work, and the thing was kept quiet. My father was a fool, the women

were rogues. I cannot help speaking my mind of them, although they are your relatives.'

'Were you not made acquainted with it?'

'I found it out,' said Mrs. Dunn. 'When I went down home last June, I had not been many hours in the house before my suspicions were aroused. I saw the game Mrs. Kage and her daughter were playing; I saw that it must have been going on for some time. Every possible wile were they exercising to entrap my father.'

'Surely not Caroline?' he interrupted. 'It must have been solely her mother.'

'Caroline was the worse of the two,' answered plain-speaking Mrs. Dunn. 'If her mother planned, she executed. I never saw a girl go more warily to work. I watched for some days, and made myself sure before I said a word. They little suspected I was looking on at the cards; and I saw the hands of both, and how they played them. Had Caroline Kage's heart been engaged in the contest—though even to say such a thing seems unpardonably absurd—had she been seeking to entrap the most desirable young fellow living, she could not have put forth her fascinations with more subtle skill.'

'I could not have supposed her capable of it,' he murmured.

'I daresay not; ' and Mrs. Dunn's voice took

a slightly sarcastic tone. 'Some of them thought her an angel: perhaps you did.'

A bright flush, visible enough had they been standing to face the gas-lamp at the corner, dyed his brow; but he did not answer.

'She is a pretty child outwardly, while inwardly she is nearly as crafty as her mother; and that's saying a good deal,' avowed Mrs. Dunn, continuing to pace the pavement in perfect independence of all gazers. 'When I disclosed to my sisters the play I saw going on, they were petrified—once they could be got to believe it might be true. Nothing could be done, it was too late; during that very hour that I was speaking to them, my father proposed to the girl, and the wedding was fixed. I came away from the Rock, refusing the countenance to affairs that my presence there might tacitly have given. You, amidst others, no doubt wondered that my anticipated long visit there turned out so short a one.'

'I remember,' he murmured.

'I never opened my lips to a living soul. It was possible, I thought, that some fortunate accident might intervene to prevent the wedding; and I was, besides, too grieved to speak. My sisters said nothing in their letters, and I hoped it was done away with—that my father had come to his senses, or Caroline Kage to hers. When those

miserable cards arrived to-day, "Mr. and Mrs. Canterbury," I wished I was near enough to fling them back in Mr. and Mrs. Canterbury's faces, and tell them what I thought.'

Mr. Kage remembered where he had flung his.

'I shall tell it to Mrs. Kage some time, if I don't to them. One of these days she and I may be face to face again; and *I* am at liberty to speak, you know, Mr. Kage: having a home of my own, I feel free to do so, just as one might who is independent of the family. Yes, yes, Madam Kage; you no doubt think you have accomplished a great thing; but it may not turn out to be altogether for Miss Caroline's good.'

'I should scarcely think it can,' he said in a low tone, speaking the sentiments that kept beating upon his heart.

'Think!' retorted Mrs. Dunn. 'No match ever made in this world, was more incongruous. My father is turned sixty; she is not twenty—what can they expect?'

'Very true.'

'Have you reflected on what it must be for my sisters?' whispered Mrs. Dunn, as they drew slowly towards the carriage; and for once her tone told of pain. 'Olive has been mistress of the Rock for twelve years, and my father brings home a mistress to put over her head,—a girl younger

in years than Millicent. Do you know what I think, Mr. Kage?’

‘No.’

‘I’ll tell you, then ; and, mind, some good instinct whispers me that I am right. When a girl can thrust herself in this unseemly manner between a father and his children’s home, she may look out for punishment instead of happiness.’

The carriage drove off, leaving him standing, Mrs. Dunn bowing her silent adieu from its window. It seemed to him that there were to be nothing but encounters that night ; for as he turned into Paradise-terrace, not caring where he walked, he met Miss Annesley. The servant in attendance on her went forward to get Mrs. Annesley’s door open.

‘I have been spending an hour with Mrs. Garston,’ she explained. ‘Have you—have you heard the news from Chilling?’

He simply nodded in answer, his pale face turning itself a little from her.

‘When Leta’s letter reached me to-day, I sat thunderstruck. O Mr. Kage, how unsuitable it is ! Mrs. Garston has been laughing over it all the evening, and saying hard truths.’

‘Ay !’

‘To me it seems an unholy marriage ; a terrible thing.’

‘Does it?’

Does it! His lips could not frame a better answer; these last few minutes had been trying him to the very uttermost. Light flashed on Sarah Annesley. Had she never seen or suspected before, the strangely-wan countenance, the passively-constrained tone, might have told her the secret.

‘Forgive me, O forgive me, Mr. Kage!’ she said in a flutter of agitation. ‘I—I did think you cared for her; I fancied it all that while back at Little Bay. Take comfort. If she knew it—and I am sure she did—she could not be worthy of you. All may be for the best.’

Wringing his hand, she turned indoors, as if not caring to look at him after her avowal of knowledge. Thomas Kage walked on down the terrace, which was a long one. His sister, Mrs. Lowther, lived at the last house in it. A servant was standing at the open door.

‘How are the children to-night?’ he stopped to ask.

‘Very ill, sir. There’s a change for the worse in Master Fairfax, and Ann have just run round for Dr. Tyndal.’

Thomas Kage turned in. The sitting-rooms were empty, and he went on up-stairs to the nursery. The children were ill with scarlatina; and Mr. Lowther was in Belgium, superintending the

construction of a railroad. Walking about the room was the nurse, singing softly to the baby in her arms.

‘Hush-sh-sh ! he’s all but off,’ cried she hastily, hearing some one enter, and supposing it to be one of her fellow-servants. ‘And I’m sure I don’t want him woke up again, for I’m tired enough as it is.’

‘What is amiss, nurse ?’ he whispered.

The young woman turned round.

‘O sir, I beg your pardon. Master Fairfax is very ill to-night, sir ; he’s quite delirious, and my mistress is afraid. Not but what I think it may be only just the turn of the disorder, when it’s sure to seem at its worst.’

Some one pushed open an inner door, saw who was there, and came forward. It was Mrs. Lowther. She had a nice face, in spite of its plain features ; it was a little careworn, and she looked her full age, six-and-thirty. Her flaxen hair was put carelessly back ; her gown, a black-and-white muslin, had plenty of creases in it ; just now she was too busy helping to nurse her sick children to be particular about attire.

‘I am sorry for this, Charlotte. One of them is worse, I hear.’

‘I think he is dying,’ she said in a weary, still tone. ‘It’s Fairfax. But are you not afraid of

being up here, Thomas? You may catch the fever.'

'I afraid of catching a children's fever!' he lightly answered. 'There's no fear. But I hope you are mistaken as to his danger. Where is he?'

Mrs. Lowther passed into the children's room. In one of the small beds lay a boy of ten. His gray eyes had a strange brightness in them; his cheeks were of a crimson hectic. Throwing his head about the bed, or quite still by turns; now he would seem to be falling into a doze, and now would wake up, rambling wildly.

'Poor little fellow!' exclaimed Thomas Kage.

Young Master Lowther was as mischievous a gentleman in ordinary as could be found within the precincts of west London. He lay disabled now. His mother stood looking on in tears.

'Do you know me, my boy?' gently asked Mr. Kage, taking the little hot hand. It was snatched away petulantly.

'You sha'n't do it, then, you fellows! I'm not Faxy; I tell you I'm not!'

He was rambling in brain amidst his school-mates, with the great school grievance tormenting him. The boys had taken to call him 'Faxy,' which was particularly objectionable to Master Fairfax. The more he showed his dislike of it

(speaking now of past reality), the more they had shouted it.

Thomas Kage bent his lips, with their soothing tones, close to the troubled, restless ear.

‘It is Fairfax—Fairfax. There! Fairfax.’

‘I am sure he is dying, Thomas,’ spoke Mrs. Lowther. ‘And Robert abroad!’

He took her by the hand and made her sit down, and waited a minute while she gave way to her tears. The boy was quiet again.

‘Charlotte, you are very tired.’

‘Very—very. It is two nights since I was in bed.’

‘And, being so tired, your spirits are naturally depressed, so that things wear their worst aspect to you,’ he calmly resumed. ‘I have had some experience in illness, and do not think he is in the danger you imagine. Children seem dying one minute and are running about the next.’

‘He is very ill, Thomas; there cannot be a question of that. It is Robert’s being away that makes me more fearful. I shall telegraph for him as soon as the doctor has been.’

‘What have you taken to-day?’ he asked, seeing how exhausted she appeared.

‘Some tea.’

‘Tea! Nothing better than tea?’

‘With all the children ill, except baby, and

Fairfax lying like this, how can I get time to take regular meals? I've had some toast-and-butter with the tea.'

'It is the very time when you ought to be cautious to keep up, so far as may be, your strength, Charlotte. If my mother were here still, she would tell you so.'

Mrs. Lowther burst into a flood of tears. Overcome with fatigue, fear, anxiety, and no doubt want of sustenance, a word was sufficient to try her.

'O Thomas, don't make me more unhappy by recalling *her*. If she were but here still, I should have something to lean on.'

He went downstairs, saying nothing; found some sherry, got an egg beaten up in it, and carried it back to her. Charlotte took it, and gazed at him through her blinding tears.

'You put me more and more in mind of her every day, Thomas. Not in looks—they say, you know, that you are more like our dead father, whom you cannot remember, and I only slightly—but in thoughtful care for others.'

Dr. Tyndal came in as Charlotte was speaking. She drank down her pleasant dose at a draught, and stood with her brother and the physician round the boy's bed. Fairfax was rambling again.

The doctor said very little, except that he hoped and thought the lad would be better in the morning. He suggested one or two slight remedies, and gave him, with his own hands, a teaspoonful of the medicine. Mrs. Lowther intimated that she was about to telegraph to Belgium for her husband.

‘You will go to the office and send the message for me, won’t you, Thomas?’ she said.

Mr. Kage nodded his head in the affirmative, and went downstairs with the man of medicine.

‘*Don’t telegraph!*’ cried the doctor emphatically, drawing Thomas Kage into a room only lighted by the street-lamps. ‘Poor Lowther is up to the eyes in work, over there; he won’t thank even his wife for disturbing him needlessly. Before to-morrow morning there’ll be a change of some sort: if, as I believe, the boy shall then be out of danger, there’ll be no need of him; if it’s the other change, time enough to summon him then.’

‘It is your true opinion—that the boy will get over it?’

‘It is. A great deal depends upon the care and nursing he gets for the next twelve hours. His mother and the nurse are three-parts worn out.’

‘I intend to sit up with him.’

‘All right. You heard my directions?’

‘Distinctly. I understand.’

The doctor departed, and Thomas Kage went up again. He told Charlotte what he intended to do—sit up with the boy, and, if God so willed, bring him through it. But for her distress, she would have laughed at the idea of his turning nurse.

He carried his point, however. Charlotte and the tired maid lay down to get the needed rest, and Thomas Kage took charge of the patient.

He had leisure to *think* in that long night-watch. Not at first; all his attention and care were needed for hours. At four o’clock in the morning the lad fell asleep, and Thomas knew he was saved; and that the need for sending for Mr. Lowther was over. As he sat back in the easy-chair afterwards, still as a mouse, a gleam of sunshine came in to illumine his heart. Every hope of happiness for himself seemed over; but life might yet have pleasant work for him in unselfishly helping his fellow-wayfarers.

‘And that, after all, must be the true way to attain to the End,’ mused Thomas Kage. ‘Only through tribulation can we forget self, and enter on its track. I am glad I came in here.’

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE.

THE rejoicings at the christening of an heir to the goodly estate of the Rock were beginning to die away in neighbouring ears. The bonfires were burnt out, the ashes of the fireworks scattered to the far winds, the tenants and labourers had digested the dinner and the drink, and things had quietly settled down again. Such rejoicings ! both indoors and out : and all because a poor little infant had come into this world of trouble.

Legally speaking, he was not born the heir, for the estate was not entailed, and Mr. Canterbury, its owner, could bequeath it to whom he would. Little danger, though, that he would leave it away from this child of his old age ; no urchin, playing at soldiers in a sword and feather bought at the fair, was ever half so vain-glorious as was Mr. Canterbury over this new baby.

The child was born on the 18th of August, which had also been, rather singular to say, his

mother's wedding-day twelve months before. Only one short twelvemonth ! and yet strange changes had taken place in it. The Miss Canterburys had quitted the Rock, and Mrs. Kage spent so much of her time there, that it might almost be said she had made it her home.

Lydia Dunn's prophecy—that her sisters would be driven from their home by its new mistress—had turned out to be a true one ; and that lady of strong common sense would have been full of self-gratulation accordingly, but for the indignant pity that was burning her to her fingers' ends.

Young Mrs. Canterbury, indulged to folly by her husband, had commenced her sway at her new home as if she thought the world was made for her exclusively. At first—quite at first—she seemed inclined to be pleasant, and to consider others as well as herself ; but she speedily fell into the mistake, that some, in a like position, had made before her—that of seeking to bend every one by whom she was surrounded to her own capricious and sovereign will. It is possible that she might not have tried to break the peace of the Miss Canterburys, but for the secret urging to it of her mother. Nay, it is not too much to say that Caroline might have been sufficiently well-disposed towards them, might have let them be happy in their father's home in her indifferent, thoughtless tem-

perament, but for the private promptings of Mrs. Kage. *She* wanted them out of it.

The young ladies bore in silence as long as they could. They *wished* to bear, and to be considerate to their father's wife, yielding to her all proper deference. But when it came to thwartings of their will and petty galling tyranny, to tacit but very palpable insult, then Olive turned. Not in the same spirit, but grandly and loftily, essaying to bring reasoning and calm remonstrance to bear. Young Mrs. Canterbury resented it, and unpleasantness ensued. Mrs. Kage, like an amiable fox, stepped in to heal the breach, and made it ten times wider. It was impossible but that Olive should detect the motive of all this—that they should be driven from the Rock, so that it might be left entirely free for Mrs. Canterbury and her mother.

She appealed to Mr. Canterbury. There was appealing and counter-appealing. That gentleman threw the whole blame back on his daughters. He was quite honest in doing it, for he could only believe them to be in fault: had an angel whispered to him that his wife could be wrong, he would have disbelieved it. With his new idol by his side in all her beauty, and the Honourable Mrs. Kage whispering sweetly-insidious whispers into his ear every other hour in the day, how could it be other-

wise? Ere Christmas had well turned, the ill-fated young ladies could bear it no longer, and were compelled to acknowledge themselves driven from their childhood's home, to find refuge elsewhere. It was arranged that they should remove to a pretty house on the estate called Thornhedge Villa; Mr. Canterbury setting them up with all things he thought necessary, including a carriage, and covenanting to allow them fifteen hundred a-year. He assumed that it would be but a temporary separation; that they would soon 'make it up' with his wife and return to the Rock. 'O, of course, dear sir, nothing but temporary; they'll speedily come to their senses,' said Mrs. Kage, softly acquiescent. And so, on a cold, bitter day in February, when the icicles hung from the trees, and snow was falling, George Canterbury's daughters went out of their luxurious home, to take possession of the comparatively humble dwelling, Thornhedge Villa.

One great feature in the programme of young Mrs. Canterbury's visions had to be dispensed with—the season in London. How ardently she had anticipated it, none save herself could tell. The presentation at Court, with its attendant outlet for gratified vanity—the opera-box, the balls, the park, the thousand-and-one features of aristocratic London life—had all to be postponed to

another year. Ere the time fixed on for removing thither—April—Caroline had fallen into so weak and suffering a state of health, that she herself was not the last to know and say she could not stir from the Rock. George Canterbury, while bewailing the fact in great anxiety, felt nevertheless quite aglow with pride and hope, in his consciousness that it was within the range of probability an heir would in course of time be born. The neighbours for miles round hoped the anticipated heir would turn out a girl; for they were brimful of sympathy for the wrongs of George Canterbury's daughters. And so the time went on to August, and on the 18th of that month doubts and fears were solved by the little child's birth—a boy.

But the year, apart from their sorrow, had not been altogether destitute of event for the Miss Canterburys. Jane was engaged to be married. An attachment had existed for some time between her and Mr. Rufort, the new Rector of Chilling. Just before Christmas, he had made proposals for her formally to Mr. Canterbury, and been accepted. His father, Lord Rufort, offered no objection to the match; but he privately told his son he ought to have done much better in point of family. Austin laughed: his reverence for 'family' was not so great as his father's; and the stern old

lord condescended to say that Miss Jane Canterbury's wealth would in a great degree atone for the other deficiency.

It was a fine night in the beginning of October. The rejoicings at the birth of the heir had died away, as already said, and Chilling was quiet again. Mr. Rufort was spending the evening with the Miss Canterburys at Thornhedge Villa; which, in point of fact, was nothing unusual. They had drawn away from the lights to collect round the large French window of the drawing-room; it opened to the sloping lawn outside, with its tufts of geraniums and other sweet autumn flowers. The night was very beautiful—calm and still and clear; the hunter's moon shone brightly in the heavens. It was growing time for Mr. Rufort to depart: they had had some music, had talked of various subjects of interest, gossip and else, and so the evening had rapidly passed. Only that day week they had been at the Rock, at the christening of the little boy-baby. A fearfully grand affair, that christening. Mr. Rufort, as rector of Chilling, had but assisted at it; nobody less than a bishop was allowed to perform the ceremony. In quitting the Rock as their residence, the Miss Canterburys—gentle, right-minded ladies—had not brought matters to a rupture; amicable relations existed, so to say, still, at which the Hon-

ourable Mrs. Kage looked on with a green, wary, jealous eye. Only this very afternoon, Mrs. Canterbury's carriage had stopped at Thornhedge Villa, and Mrs. Canterbury herself, lovely and more blooming than ever, had come in to pay a visit. One fact the young ladies could not help noticing : that they were not encouraged to go to the Rock at will. If invited on any chance state occasion, well and good ; but otherwise they were not expected at it. Ah, they had a great deal to bear ! But the evening was over ; Mr. Rufort could not linger, and shook hands with them.

‘I may as well go out this way,’ he observed, opening the half-window.

‘But your hat,’ said Miss Canterbury.—‘Ring, Millicent.’

‘Do not ring ; I have it here,’ he interposed, taking from his pocket a cloth cap, doubled into a small compass. ‘There,’ said he, exhibiting it on his hand for their inspection ; ‘what do you think of it ? I call it my weather-cap. If I am fetched out at night, I put on this, tie it over my ears, and so defy wind and rain.’

‘You had no wind or rain to-night,’ remarked Millicent.

‘No ; but in coming out I could not find my hat. It is a failing of mine, that of losing my

things in all corners of the house. I sadly want somebody to keep me in order,' he added, looking at Jane.

'Some men never can be kept in order,' interposed Millicent rather saucily, with a touch of her old light spirit, which, from some cause or other, had been sadly heavy for a long while.

'I am not one of those,' laughingly replied Mr. Rufort. 'Well, good-night. Jane, you may as well come as far as the gate with me.'

Jane glanced at Olive as she would have glanced to a mother; Miss Canterbury had been regarded by the others almost in the light of one. Mr. Rufort held the glass-door wide for her, and she stepped on to the gravel path; he then closed the window, and held out his arm. Jane finished tying her pocket-handkerchief round her throat, and took it. He walked bareheaded.

'Put on your cap, Austin.'

'All in good time,' he replied.

'You will take cold.'

'Cold, Jane! A clergyman is not fit for his work if he cannot stand for an hour with his head uncovered in bad weather—and to-night is fine. If you saw the model of a guy this elegant cap makes of me and my beauty, you might take it in your head to reject me.'

Jane smiled; her own quiet, confiding smile:

and Mr. Rufort looked at her; and drew her arm closer against his side.

‘Jane, I had a selfish motive in bringing you out with me. It was to tell you that the rectory wants a mistress, and the parish wants a mistress, and I want a wife. We cannot get along as we are.’

‘Mr. Annesley had no—’ wife, Jane was going to say, but stopped herself ere the word fell. ‘The rectory and the parish had no mistress in his time,’ she resumed, framing her answer more to her satisfaction, ‘and he got along, Austin.’

‘After a fashion : a miserable fashion it must have been. That’s one cause why things have tumbled into their present state. *I* don’t mean to let them be without one long.’

Like the arguments of a great many more people, Mr. Rufort’s, strictly examined, would not have held water. If the late Rector had not (for many years at least) had a wife, the rectory and the parish had had in his daughter a most efficient mistress. Mr. Rufort, so far, was but speaking in jest, as Jane knew.

‘Here we are at the gate,’ she said. ‘And now I must go back, or Olive will be calling to me. She is watching me from the window, I am sure, to see that I don’t linger.’

‘Not she. She knows you are safe with me.’

‘O, certainly; but she is always fancying we shall take cold.’

‘You take cold? I declare I forgot that. I beg your pardon for my thoughtlessness, Jane. Well, then, I will not keep you now, but I shall speak further to-morrow.’

He threw his arm round her waist with a quick movement, and drew her behind the shrubbery which skirted the gate, so that they were hidden from the house. And there he imprinted kiss after kiss upon her unresisting face.

‘O my goodness!’ groans the fastidious reader. ‘A clergyman!’

Well, of course it was grievously improper. But, as it did happen, where’s the use of hypocritically concealing it?

‘Jane, my darling,’ he murmured, ‘I must have you at the rectory before Christmas. Think it over.’

‘As you will,’ she softly answered.

With the last kiss Mr. Rufort opened the gate, swung through it, and took the path that led to the rectory. Jane stood a moment to watch him: she saw him put on his ‘guy of a cap;’ she saw him turn and nod to her in the moonlight: and she clasped her hands together with a movement of happy thankfulness, thinking how very much she loved him. Olive, anxious on the score of the

night-air, for she did not fancy Jane was particularly strong, tapped at the window, and the young lady ran in.

The following afternoon, as the Miss Canterburys were crossing the Rock-field, as it was called, on their way home, they saw Mr. Rufort at a distance. He turned to meet them; but his step seemed slow and weary; his face wore a vexed, grave look. Millicent noticed it.

‘He has been annoyed with some parish business or other,’ surmised Olive; ‘though it must be more than a trifle to affect Mr. Rufort. I must say, Jane, you will have a good-tempered husband. If Austin has no other praisable quality, he has that of a sweet temper.’

‘I think he has a great many others,’ returned Jane in her quiet way. And Olive laughed.

Mr. Rufort came up. After a minute spent in greeting, he touched Jane, and caused her to slacken her pace. Miss Canterbury and Millicent walked on.

‘Jane,’ said he, when the distance between them had increased, ‘what is this barrier that has come, or is coming, between us?’

Jane Canterbury looked at him for a few moments in silent surprise. His face was pale; he was evidently agitated.

'I do not know what you are speaking of, Austin,' she said at length.

'My father rode over to-day, and told me, without any preparation or circumlocution, that things must be at an end between us. And when I asked him what he meant, and wherefore it was to be, he said I might ask that of Mr. Canterbury. Have you heard anything?'

'Nothing,' said Jane—'nothing.' And her look of consternation too plainly indicated that she had not. 'But did Lord Rufort give you no further explanation?'

'I could get nothing else from him. He was in that inaccessible humour of his, which is a sure indication that something has gone wrong. He did not get off his horse. Mrs. Kage, who in passing had stepped inside the rectory gate to look at my autumn flowers, was with me in the garden when he rode up. He made a sign to me with his whip, and I went out. The groom had drawn up close behind, and my father, seeing this, said, "Ride on, sir;" and of course Richard rode on. I knew by the sharp tone all was not smooth; and then he told me what I have said to you, just in so many words.'

Jane's heart was beating.

'What was it he meant about my father?'

'I asked an explanation. He seemed too angry,

or too—if I may use the word—too lofty to give it; and said I had best inquire that of Mr. Canterbury. “Or of the neighbourhood either, for it is no secret,” he added, as he rode off, barely lifting his hat to Mrs. Kage, who had come to the gate.’

‘Papa was with us this morning,’ observed Jane. ‘He appeared just the same as usual, and did not hint at anything amiss; indeed, he was joking with me, and asked when I meant to take up my residence at the rectory. Do you think there can be any mistake—any misapprehension on Lord Rufort’s part?’

‘Misapprehension of what?’ debated Mr. Rufort, standing still as he asked the question.

She could not say; she could not imagine what, more than he. Both were completely at sea. One fact was indisputable—that Lord Rufort, sedate, sure, cautious, was the last man in the world to take up a mistaken notion, no matter what it might relate to. That some trouble or other had arisen, they felt very certain; and a miserable sense of discomfort took possession of both. Mr. Rufort was the first to speak.

‘Whatsoever it may be, Jane, let us prepare to meet it,’ he impressively said, laying his hand upon her arm, and gazing into her eyes. ‘We are no longer children, and may not be dealt with

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as such. To fly in the face of parental authority and marry in defiance of it, is what, with our professed feelings and principles, we could neither of us do ; but on the other hand, no father, whether yours or mine, can be justified in attempting to separate us. Therefore, should a storm be bursting over our heads, we will wait with what patience we may until it is weathered, implicitly trusting in each other's faith, secure in each other's love. Do you understand me, my dearest ?

‘ Yes,’ she sighed ; ‘ and I think you are right, Austin. I promise to be guided by you in all things. I know you will not lead me wrong.’

He snatched her hand and clasped it. They were in the open field, or he might have snatched something else.

‘ Then we rest secure in mutual faith and truth,’ he said as they began to walk on. ‘ Whatsoever shall betide, you are still mine : remember that, Jane.’

Olive and Millicent had stopped, and were looking back. Olive thought they seemed agitated, and she wondered : the calm-natured, easy-mannered minister, the sensible, tranquil Jane. Could anything be wrong ?

‘ Walk on and wait at the stile,’ said Miss Canterbury to Millicent, whom she was a little apt to consider a child still. And so Millicent

went on, and Olive took a few steps backward to meet them.

‘Is anything amiss, Mr. Rufort?’

‘Austin, let us tell Olive,’ was Jane’s hurried whisper.

‘Of course,’ he answered. ‘I intended to do so.’

Olive listened to his explanation, and smiled a little as she did so. In her way she was every whit as lofty as Lord Rufort, in mind and manner too. That anything could be supposed to happen sufficient to separate Jane and Austin Rufort, short of their own free will, she looked upon in the light of a simple absurdity. Mistakes, misapprehensions, were common enough in the world, she observed; this must be one.

‘Not the least-to-be-comprehended part of the whole is, that my father should have said it was no secret in the neighbourhood,’ observed Mr. Rufort.

‘Yes, that certainly sounds a little curious,’ assented Olive.

‘The most feasible construction I can put upon it is, that his lordship and Mr. Canterbury may have had some quarrel,’ continued Mr. Rufort. ‘Though how my father can construe that into a reason for my giving up Jane, I cannot conceive. He is not an unjust man.’

‘I feel thoroughly sure that when we saw papa this morning, he had had no quarrel whatever with Lord Rufort,’ replied Olive; ‘and I feel almost as sure that they have not met since. Papa left us before one o’clock to go home to an early luncheon, for he and Mrs. Canterbury were going out afterwards to pay some visit; and we saw the carriage drive by with them.’

‘They cannot have met Lord Rufort, and—and—had any disagreement then?’ hesitated Jane.

‘Nonsense, Jane,’ reproved Olive; ‘they would not dispute in the presence of Mrs. Canterbury. To suppose either of them likely to dispute, under any circumstances, seems to me excessively improbable. Who is it that Leta is talking to over the stile so eagerly?—O Mr. Carlton.’

‘Is it Carlton?’ cried the Rector. ‘They are discussing the world’s private affairs, then, for he hears all the gossip and can keep nothing in. But I must leave you for the present, Miss Canterbury; I shall see you to-night.—Good-bye, Jane.’

He struck across the field, and they walked on leisurely towards the stile. Millicent turned, and ran back to meet them in haste and unmistakable excitement.

‘What is it, Leta?’ asked Miss Canterbury.

‘O Olive!’ was the reply, and Millicent was

breathless as she spoke it, 'I don't fully understand what it is. Mr. Carlton has been telling me something about papa.'

'What has he been telling you?'

Millicent entered on the tale as succinctly as her agitation permitted her. Between that, and her own imperfect knowledge, it was not very clear. It appeared that as she reached the stile, when sent forward by Olive, their old friend, Mr. Carlton of Chilling Hall, was passing down the road in his pony-gig. Seeing Millicent, he stopped, got out, and went to her.

'My dear,' he began, without greeting or circumlocution, 'tell your sisters that I have refused to act, for I will never have a hand in robbing them or you.'

'In robbing us, Mr. Carlton!' was Leta's surprised rejoinder.

'To give your patrimony to others and turn you out penniless is a robbery, and nothing less,' continued Mr. Carlton; 'therefore I have informed my old friend Canterbury that he must get somebody else to help him in his injustice, for I won't. Tell your sisters this, my dear; and tell them that if they should be stripped of their rights, they shall come home to the Hall and be my daughters.'

This was what had passed; and what Milli-

cent now repeated to her sisters nearly word for word.

‘Was this all?’ asked Olive, as the recital ceased.

‘All,’ said Millicent. ‘Mr. Carlton had to run on to the pony, which would not stand, and I came to you. What can it mean, Olive? Does Mrs. Canterbury wish papa to take from us the income he allows and turn us from Thornhedge Villa, as she did—for it was her doing—from the Rock?’

‘No,’ answered Miss Canterbury, drawing up her head in her haughty way, ‘papa will not allow her to go that length, I think. The world must have got hold of some preposterous and improbable invention, and poor Mr. Carlton has heard it. He takes in everything, whether true or false. Why, Millicent, you could have contradicted it on the spot: was not papa with us this morning, kind as ever?’

‘This is what has reached the ears of Lord Rufort, then,’ remarked Jane.

‘No doubt. Lord Rufort is known to be a gold-worshipper, and Austin’s living is small. How can so improbable a tale have arisen?’

When they reached the stile, the first object visible was Mr. Carlton, standing by his pony-gig a short way down the road. Something was

amiss with the harness, and he was setting it to rights.

‘Mr. Carlton, where did you pick up that sublime information?’ inquired Olive, walking up to him.

‘What information?’ asked he, busy with his straps and buckles.

‘That we are to be consigned to the Union tomorrow, and our house and furniture let to the highest bidder, plate included?’ she said, with good-humoured sarcasm.

‘Did Leta tell you that?’

‘Something equivalent to it,’ laughed Olive.

‘She did, did she? A young goose! I perceive you have kept it from her: I saw she did not understand me; so I laid the blame on my pony, poor quiet creature, and flew away from her, without saying more. Miss Olive, I am truly sorry; this infatuation of your father’s has given me a sleepless night. Had I ever supposed this was to be the upshot, I’d have seen Mrs. Kage hanged before I’d consented to stand father-in-church at the wedding.’

Olive felt herself in the dark. And it was not a pleasant darkness by any means.

‘Will you please inform me what there is to be sorry for, Mr. Carlton, and what is the nature of my father’s “infatuation”?’ There’s

many a foolish tale concocted in the village club-room.'

Mr. Carlton turned from his harness to look at her. He was a genial-looking man, with a ruddy countenance, silver hair, and dark pleasant eyes.

'Are you asking me this seriously, Olive? Or are you carrying on a jest with me?'

'Nay,' said Olive, 'are you carrying on a jest with us? Is there, or is there not, anything to tell? Papa was with us this morning; he hinted at nothing; he was as kind and talkative as usual.'

'Then you don't know it?' cried Mr. Carlton in amaze.

'I know nothing. What is there to know?'

'My dear Miss Olive, I surely believed you knew all—more, indeed, than I do. I thought I understood from Mr. Canterbury that his daughters were privy to the arrangement; I fully thought he said so. It must have been my own mistake.'

Olive waited; she supposed he would come to the point in time. Mr. Carlton appeared to be revolving matters while he stood. Suddenly he struck the shaft of the gig with emphasis.

'Well, I *don't* regret having told you, my dear. No, I don't. It would be a cruel thing for it to

come upon you like a thunderbolt when he was gone.'

'But you have not told me, Mr. Carlton. See how patiently I am waiting to hear it.'

'Your father dropped me a note some days ago saying he was going to make his will, and asking me if I would oblige him by being one of the executors,' began Mr. Carlton, plunging into the story. 'I dropped a note back to say Yes. But I reminded him that I was born in the same year that he was, and that his life, so far as anybody knew, was just as good as mine. Don't you think it is, Miss Olive?'

'Yes. Pray go on.'

'Well, the will was prepared; and I conclude we should have been called upon to sign shortly. But yesterday morning when I was at the Rock, in talking of it with Mr. Canterbury, I said to him—just as old friends do say such things to each other—that I hoped he had taken good care of his daughters. And, to my utter surprise, I found he had cut you off with the most paltry sum conceivable—five thousand each.'

A spot of glowing vermilion shone forth from Miss Canterbury's cheeks. They burnt like fire.

'So I told him I would be no executor to that will; and therefore, if he could not make a better, he must find somebody else to act; I wouldn't.

And away I came in a huff, and nearly fell over Mrs. Canterbury, who was at the study-door when I opened it. Miss Olive'—and the speaker dropped his voice to a whisper, as if afraid the pony might hear, or the hedges on either side—'I think young madam must have been listening: though I'd not have such a hint get abroad for all the money ever coined. And her mother was peeping her old face round the boudoir-door *seeing* that she did it.'

'The property is left to Mrs. Canterbury!' remarked Olive, her eyes flashing.

'Of course. To her and the boy between them. I was too hot and vexed to retain the particulars, but I can get them if I want to. Its being willed away from you and your sisters was too much for me. Why, Miss Olive, the least he could do, would be to leave you fifty thousand apiece, seeing that you were but lately heiresses to all of it. Or let him be *just*, in spite of his new wife and boy, and halve the whole.'

Old friend though Mr. Carlton was, almost like a second father, Olive Canterbury almost disdained to discuss the affair with him. It was not the loss of the money, so much as the injustice in itself that angered her.

'How did this family-matter get abroad?' she asked somewhat abruptly.

‘O, it is known everywhere,’ was the Irish answer. ‘We were talking about it at the magistrates’ meeting at Aberton yesterday.’

‘Who told it there?’ persisted Olive. ‘Did you?’

‘I don’t think I did; I am not sure, though. I know we began talking of it all in a hurry, and forgot to send up the memorial about a prisoner to the Secretary of State. When the meeting was over, Lord Rufort came out with me, and asked me the particulars.’

‘Your poor tongue!’ thought Olive.

‘And that’s all, my dear. And don’t you forget, if this wholesale thieving is carried out and you are deprived of your own, that there’s more than room for you and Leta at the Hall—Jane will be at the rectory, I suppose. You must come to it and be my daughters.’

He shook her hand as he spoke, and, hastily ascending to his gig, drove off out of her sight, for his eyes were filling. Miss Canterbury went back to her sisters, who had waited for her at the stile.

‘I cannot stay to say anything now, Jane,’ hastily spoke Olive, purposely anticipating questions. ‘Walk home with Millicent, will you? I am going into Chilling again.’

‘To Chilling!’

‘Yes, I have business there.’

She was accustomed to rule things in this decisive way, and they never thought of questioning it. But Jane glanced at her watch. Their dinner-hour was six, and it wanted but half-an-hour to it.

‘If you go back now, Olive, you will not be home in time to dress.’

‘Then I must dispense with dressing for one evening — or with dinner,’ was the reply; and Olive’s tone as she spoke was very bitter.

Leaving her sisters standing in surprise, Miss Canterbury went back along the field-path; it was rather shorter than the roadway. To say she felt indignant at the news breathed into her ear, would not be saying half enough; but the first thing to be done was to ascertain if the tale were true, for Mr. Carlton’s information was not always to be depended on. He was as a very woman for gossip, and sometimes, quite unconsciously to himself, took up an aspect of reports that was afterwards found to be entirely the reverse of fact. That no one but Mr. Norris, the family solicitor, would be employed upon legal business by her father, she felt sure. His office was at Aberton; his residence at Chilling, not far from the parsonage. He was a man in extensive practice, and moved in good society. Olive went

straight to his house, and found he had just got home.

Mr. Norris came to her in the drawing-room. The young ladies knew him well; but, in spite of his mixing with them on an apparent equality, Olive was fully conscious of the real distance that existed. It peeped out this evening in her manner; and in her heart she was resenting his having been in any way a participator in making so unjust a will. She turned to face him as he came in, and spoke without any preface of compliments, her air and voice alike redolent of command.

‘Mr. Norris, what is this I hear about my father’s will?’

‘How have you heard it?’ was the rejoinder of Mr. Norris.

Olive darted a glance at him from beneath her haughty eyelids, which plainly inquired by what right he put the question; and the lawyer understood it perfectly.

‘I heard it in the same way that others have heard it; it is the common topic of the neighbourhood. Did you make it for him?’

‘I did. The reason I inquired where you had heard it, Miss Canterbury, was that I hoped it might have been from himself. I think if Mr. Canterbury would only converse with his daughters respecting it, he might be brought to see his

decision in a different light. Pray be seated, Miss Canterbury.'

'I prefer to stand. Will you give me the heads of the will?'

'I find that its particulars have really got abroad, so that I can have no scruple in doing so,' he replied. 'I cannot but think Mr. Carlton is the traitor: not an intentional one, poor man; but, if ever a secret does get intrusted to him, it is a secret no longer.'

'What is the amount willed to me and my sisters?' impatiently interrupted Miss Canterbury.

'Five thousand pounds each.'

'Shameful!' responded her heart. 'And the rest to Mrs. Canterbury?' she inquired aloud.

'Mrs. Canterbury has her settlement, and a very large sum besides; but the bulk of the property is left to the infant. In case of its death, it becomes Mrs. Canterbury's.'

'All of it?'

'All. It passes to her absolutely and unconditionally.'

'Does the Rock pass to her?'

'The Rock, and also its large revenues.'

'Mr. Norris, do you call this a just will?'

'It is the most unjust will I ever made!' he replied with warmth. 'I said so to Mr. Canter-

bury. I assure you, Miss Canterbury, that if you and your sisters have been thus dealt by, it was not for want of remonstrance on my part. All I could venture to urge, in my position as legal adviser, I did urge; but Mr. Canterbury has in this instance proved himself a self-willed client.'

'My father must have been influenced, as he has been in other matters,' remarked Miss Canterbury. And Mr. Norris's raised eyebrows and expression of countenance told that he more than agreed with her. 'Is the will signed?'

'No. There is some delay in consequence of Mr. Carlton's refusing to act as executor. When he heard what were the provisions of the will, he turned on Mr. Canterbury and said he would not act: he came to my office at Aberton, and told me. Carlton said he had hitherto managed to keep his hands from dabbling with injustice, and hoped to do so still.'

'Who are the other executors?'

'There is only one other named—Mrs. Canterbury.'

'O,' said Olive.

'Since Mr. Carlton's refusal to act, I have seen Mr. Canterbury, and again urged upon him that a more equitable disposal should be made. I gained nothing by it, I fear.'

'What was Mr. Canterbury's reply?'

‘He said that he had been advised it was not an unequitable disposal: that a wife and son generally inherited to the exclusion of daughters.’

‘Advised!’ scornfully ejaculated Olive. ‘Mrs. Kage has had to do with this—more than Mrs. Canterbury. Does he call five thousand pounds a fitting portion for us, brought up in the luxury we have been, and with our expectations?’

‘I submitted that question to him, Miss Canterbury, almost in the same words you have used. He replied, that you already inherited five thousand pounds each by the death of your mother—as is the case—and that five thousand more would make it ten thousand.’

‘Ten thousand pounds for the daughters of Mr. Canterbury of the Rock!’ was Olive’s resentful comment.

‘Ten thousand, all told,’ quietly replied the lawyer. ‘Mrs. Kage has a like sum.’

‘A like sum! Bequeathed by my father?’

Mr. Norris inclined his head in the affirmative.

Olive’s breath left her. A hundred remonstrances rose to her mind, a hundred indignant protests to her lips. So many, so tumultuous were they, that none were uttered.

‘Is there no appeal, no redress against these

unjust wills?' she exclaimed, when her silence had spent itself.

'The only appeal can lie in getting the testator to revoke them,' he replied, looking meaningly at Miss Canterbury. 'When once the testator has passed away, the will becomes law, and must be carried out. I will urge the bearings of the case again on Mr. Canterbury, but—'

'No,' interrupted Miss Canterbury, 'it is his family who must urge it upon him: if only to save his name from reproach.'

'I was about to say so,' returned the lawyer. 'It is Mr. Canterbury's family—in fact, *you*, Miss Canterbury, who must deal with this. If you cannot prevail with him, no one can; there's not a chance of it.'

Olive knew it well.

'I will delay the execution of the will as long as possible, Miss Canterbury, in the hope that I may be furnished with instructions to make a different one. I told Mr. Canterbury I would charge nothing for drawing a fresh one out. Not—pardon me—to save his pocket, but that he might see how urgent I considered the necessity to be.'

'Thank you, Mr. Norris,' frankly spoke Olive. 'I was blaming you in my heart when I came in, but I perceive no fault lies with you.'

She shook hands with him. He attended

her to the door, and she departed on her walk back across the Rock-field, plunged in deep reflection. That this terrible, barefaced act of injustice was owing almost entirely to Mrs. Kage, Olive felt sure: Caroline, let alone, would never have thought of being so grasping. And Olive was right.

In point of fact, that honourable lady had been feathering her nest pretty considerably ever since the marriage. Her daughter largely helped her; there could be no question of it. Mrs. Kage's former modest household of two servants had been augmented by a smart lady's-maid named Fry. A beautiful pony-carriage—kept at the Rock—was devoted to her special service, and Mrs. Kage, with a parasol in one hand and scent-bottle in the other, went about in it, driven by a natty boy-groom. A close carriage was at her service whenever she chose to send and order it. Her table was munificently supplied with the choicest fruit from the Rock-gardens when she did not dine at the Rock. Fish and other delicacies came daily to her from Aberton. Her attire was now magnificent, especially in the respect of costly old lace, and pinching in money-matters was at an end. In short, Mrs. Kage's lines had dropped into pleasant places; and there could be no question that her daughter's marriage with George

Canterbury had brought *to her* all its hoped-for realisation.

This assistance might have been carried out for her mother twice over, had Mrs. Canterbury so pleased, and nobody found fault with it. To Mr. Canterbury's great wealth it was as a drop of water to the ocean. But to will away the daughters' inheritance was a very different affair; and so little necessity was there for anything of the kind, Mr. Canterbury's riches being amply sufficient to provide munificently for all, that a doubt crossed Olive, as she waalked long the field, of Mrs. Kage's sanity. Tracing events back, she could see that it was all a part of one deep-laid scheme; and Mrs. Kage had driven them from the Rock to have room to work it out. The birth of the child had been made a pretext for Mrs. Kage's taking up her abode at the Rock; she had not yet come away from it. With that wily, plotting, soft-speaking woman ever at his elbow, Olive felt that her chance of being heard to effect was very small indeed. Bitterly she deplored her father's pliant, yielding disposition, and the strange ascendancy it had enabled the new wife and the crafty mother-in-law to gain over him.

When she reached home, she imparted the news to her sisters; and they spent the evening talking it over with the Reverend Mr. Rufort. It

was decided that Olive should proceed to the Rock the following day, and see what impression she could make upon her father.

‘I heartily wish you success, Miss Canterbury,’ were Mr. Rufort’s last words to her, when he was leaving.

‘You cannot wish it more than I do. Putting our own interests aside, I would not that my father, for his own sake, should leave behind him so unjust a will, for his name would lie under obloquy for ever.’

But, notwithstanding the words, there lay an instinct on Miss Canterbury’s heart that she should *not* prevail; and the whole night long she never closed her eyes.

She reached the Rock in the morning between eleven and twelve, when she knew her father would most probably be alone in the library. The initiative preliminary of the visit was not propitious. The servant who opened the door to her happened to be a fresh one; a fine gentleman just arrived from London as own footman to Mrs. Canterbury. Olive walked straight into the hall without speaking. The man stared, and then seemed to recollect something.

‘I beg your parding, mem—might you be Miss Canterbury?’

‘I am Miss Canterbury,’ Olive condescended

to reply, though she considered the question, and the manner too, somewhat impertinent.

The man placed himself in her way as she was walking on towards the library.

‘Then if you please, mem, will you step into this here parlour? You are not to go in, mem.’

Olive turned her lofty face upon him. He did not altogether like its air of command, and resumed with civility.

‘Mem, Mrs. Kage told me that you was not to go in to Mr. Canterbury, should you happen to call, but was to be showed in here, and herself fetched down to you. She ordered it, mem, and I could not think of disobeying of her.’

‘Sir!’ burst out Olive, ‘do you know to whom you speak? I am in my father’s house. Stand aside!’

He stood aside, foolish and humble, and at that same moment the butler came forward.

‘Neel,’ said she, in a calm tone, almost an indifferent one, ‘you had better tell that man who I am; he does not appear to understand, I think.’

Neel, all astonishment, gazed at the new footman, whom he did not particularly favour, from head to foot; and turned to usher Miss Canterbury into his master’s presence.

In passing through the hall, the door of one of the drawing-rooms was flung back, and the

nurse came out, carrying the baby. Olive, unthinkingly, turned her head to look in. There, talking together face to face, stood Mrs. Canterbury and Thomas Kage.

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